South Haven Tribune

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May 24, 2026

SH council appoints members to boards

City master plan gets updates, new clerk named

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven City Council appointed 13 people to 14 positions in various boards and commissions with terms beginning June 1.

The people appointed include:

■ Jordan Alsup to the downtown development authority for a four-year term.

■ Ryan Servatius to the downtown development authority for a four-year term and the planning commission for a three-year term.

■ Kevin Conway to the harbor commission for a three-year term.

■ Mary Kilpatrick-Hall to the housing commission for a five-year term.

■ Patricia Hudson to the Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum board for a three-year term.

■ Kirk Wiley to the Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum board for a three-year term.

■ Sondra Sutton to the Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum board for a three-year term.

■ Kent Brindley to the parks commission for a three-year term.

■ David Kingsbury to the parks commission for a three-year term.

■ Clark Gruber to the planning commission for a three-year term.

■ Bob Sherman to the planning commission for a three-year term.

■ Brian Sheehy to the South Haven Water Sewer Authority for a four-year term.

■ Lisa Stegall to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a three-year term as an alternate.

Council members Letitia Wilkins and Mary Hosley expressed concerns about having Servatius on the DDA and the city's planning commission.

"I noticed that there is one person on two committees and I wanted to know, were there not any other applicants to fill those?" Wilkins said.

Mayor Annie Brown said there were other applications for the planning commission, but appointed Servatius.

Servatius is currently on the DDA and would be continuing for another four-year term.

"For (the) planning commission, by state law, the membership is supposed to be representative of the

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Photo provided / Tom Renner

Executive Director Brandon Hinz stands with other fire service leaders who were also sworn in as regional delegates and executive board members for the Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs.

Chief Brandon Hinz named to state leadership position

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven Area Emergency Services Executive Director Brandon Hinz was recently sworn in as the region 5 representative for the Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs during the Leadership Symposium.

HINZ

According to a news release, the symposium brought together fire service leaders from across Michigan to collaborate on leadership development, emerging operational challenges, training strategies, department readiness and the future of emergency response.

"Serving as a regional representative provides an opportunity to strengthen collaboration among departments, advocate for regional needs and help ensure communities like ours continue to benefit from strong partnerships across the fire and EMS service," the release stated. "Their shared commitment to leadership, collaboration and service helps strengthen the fire service across our state."

Hinz joined the South Haven Area Emergency Services (SHAES) staff in 1999. A lifelong resident of the South Haven community, he started as a paid-on-call responder and since 2005 has been a full-time firefighter/paramedic. In 2012 he was presented the department's Leadership Award. He was named executive director/chief in 2020.

Hinz lives in Geneva Township with his wife Dawn and sons Jake and Cal.

"South Haven Area Emergency Services is grateful for the opportunity to have representation at the regional level and looks forward to continuing to bring ideas, partnerships and best practices back to serve our communities," Hinz said in the release.

SHAES serves the city of South Haven and townships of Casco, Geneva and South Haven with fire and advance life support ambulance service from three stations. The department numbers 22 career and 29 paid-on-call members.

South Haven prepares for the upcoming summer season

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Although cooler temperatures have lingered longer than usual this spring, the City of South Haven is actively preparing for the upcoming busy summer season.

According to a news release, 60 seasonal employees have been hired to serve as bridge tenders, dock hands, parks and cemetery workers, parking enforcement officers, beach enforcement attendants and lifeguards.

Applications are still being accepted for lifeguard and beach enforcement attendant positions at www.southhavenmi.gov/human_resources.

As residents and visitors begin enjoying the warmer weather, the city reminds the public of the seasonal operations and services taking place throughout the city.

Lifeguards

■ Lifeguards will be on duty at South Beach only beginning Memorial Day. All other beaches and beach access points will remain unguarded.

■ Typical hours of operation will be 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., daily, depending on staffing levels.

■ For safety, South Beach visitors must adhere to instructions from lifeguards.

Beach enforcement attendants

■ Attendants will be on duty beginning May 15.

■ Attendants enforce the provisions of the South Haven Code of Ordinances related to the beaches and parks at all seven beaches and access points.

■ Typical hours of operation for beach attendants will be 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

■ For safety, visitors to all beaches and access points must adhere to instructions from attendants.

Beach accessibility

■ Transfer stations for wheelchair accessibility are available at both South Beach and North Beach.

■ Beach wheelchairs are available for reservation at South Beach beginning May 15 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

■ To reserve a beach wheelchair, go to southhaven.simplybook.me/v2/.

Dyckman Bridge

■ Bridge Tenders will be on duty Sundays through Thursdays from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. and Fridays and Saturdays from 6 a.m. to midnight.

■ The bridge opens and closes on the hour and half-hour.

■ Bridge Tenders monitor on channel 9 and transmit on channel 12.

Parking enforcement

■ Paid parking at city beaches will be enforced May 15 through Sept. 15 between the hours of 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

■ Three-hour parking restrictions are in place for designated downtown areas. The City offers free, all-day parking in several lots.

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Blackmon to fill Lake Michigan College board vacancy

Boys & Girls Club CEO praises 'vital role' of higher education

By TONY WITTKOWSKI
Paxton Media Group

BLACKMON

BENTON TOWNSHIP — The Lake Michigan College board has voted to appoint Alloyd Blackmon as its newest trustee, filling the seat vacated by Joan Smith, who resigned in January.

Blackmon brings to the board a career in corporate leadership, nonprofit management and community service across Southwest Michigan. She currently serves as CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Southwest Michigan, which provides after-school and summer programming for youth in grades 1-12.

"I have seen firsthand the vital role Lake Michigan College plays in Southwest Michigan," Blackmon said in a news release. "My own daughter earned her associate degree here. Having a community college that gives our young people a strong foundation before they transfer to a four-year institution is incredibly important. Higher education has the power to truly transform lives, and to be given the opportunity to contribute to the great work LMC is already doing means a great deal to me."

Prior to her nonprofit leadership role, Blackmon retired from Whirlpool Corp. in Benton Harbor in 2020 after a 32-year career with the organization. She also manages the Benton Harbor Promise, a post-secondary scholarship program that supports Benton Harbor students in pursuing higher education.

Blackmon is no stranger to Lake Michigan College, having previously served on the LMC Foundation Board of Directors. She also serves on the boards of Mosaic CCDA, the Benton Harbor Education Foundation, and the Horizon Bank Southwest Michigan Advisory board.

She earned her master's of science in management and her bachelor's degree from Purdue University in Lafayette, Ind. Blackmon resides in Stevensville, Mich., and and has two daughters.

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The Tribune: Celebrating Our 127th Year

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Support the Local Businesses Who Help Support Our Community!

Boat engine mishap leads to structure fire in Columbia Township

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Several South Haven area fire departments responded to a structure fire Columbia Township Tuesday morning.

According to a news release, the fire started in a garage at 10767 53rd Street and spread to the nearby residence.

Firefighters successfully contained the fire to the residence.

"The homeowner said the fire started when he was trying to start the engine to a boat in the garage," the release stated. "He said he tried unsuccessfully to extinguish the blaze with a fire extinguisher."

The occupants were reported to have escaped without injury.

Mutual aid was provided by the Bangor Community, Bloomingdale Township, Lee Township fire departments and South Haven Area Emergency Services. Van Buren EMS also responded.

Photo provided / Tom Renner

Local fire departments respond to a garage fire in Columbia Township Tuesday morning.

Michigan lawmaker ousted from committee after clash, Epstein probe demand

By BETH LEBLANC
The Detroit News (TNS)

A Democratic state lawmaker was removed from her House committee assignments Wednesday for what Republican leadership maintained was disrespectful behavior on the committee, but what the lawmaker believed to be retaliation.

State Rep. Penelope Tsernoglou, D-East Lansing, said she was informed Wednesday afternoon of her removal from the House Oversight Committee and one of its subcommittees. The removal came a day after Tsernoglou held a press conference to renew calls for a House Oversight probe of disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein's ties to the Interlochen Center for the Arts in northern Michigan.

"Speaker Hall's decision to remove me from all my committees is truly shocking," Tsernoglou said in a statement Wednesday. "The Speaker of the House has decided to retaliate against me for daring to publicly ask him to investigate Jeffrey Epstein."

State Rep. Jay DeBoyer, a Clay Township Republican and chairman of the House Oversight Committee, said Tsernoglou's removal was tied to disrespectful behavior during committee meetings, citing a recent clash between Tsernoglou and state Rep. Jason Woolford, a Howell Republican who chairs an oversight subcommittee on state and local public assistance.

"Clearly, a display of complete unprofessional behavior in committee, disrespect for the chair, I mean, blatant disrespect for the chair," DeBoyer said. "This has been an ongoing pattern.

"And so a decision was made," he added. "If she's not going to come with intent to do what the purpose of oversight is, and it's really going to be political gotcha stuff, it doesn't serve a purpose for the people of the state of Michigan."

Tsernoglou noted while speaking with reporters Wednesday that she wasn't the only woman to run afoul of House leadership. Hall previously removed all bills from committees led by two Republican members who missed legislative session work days in the House: state Rep. Pauline Wendzel, R-Watervliet, and state Rep. Jaime Greene, R-Richmond.

Separately, state Rep. Alabas Farhat, D-Dearborn, was removed from the House Appropriations Committee after clashing with GOP leadership.

"Speaker Hall has a record of silencing the voices of strong women as well as anyone else who speaks out against him and his policies," Tsernoglou said.

During the Thursday hearing cited by DeBoyer, according to a recording, Tsernoglou and Woolford clashed while receiving testimony from Unemployment Insurance Agency Director Jason Palmer. Woolford apologized to Palmer for the "disruption" and "unprofessionalism." Tsernoglou accused him of being rude and said, "I think we've had enough of this from you."

On Tuesday, Tsernoglou held a press conference reiterating her call for an investigation into Epstein's ties to Interlochen, a fine arts boarding school and summer camp in Grand Traverse County.

Tsernoglou and other Democratic members have cited a trove of documents recently released by the U.S. Department of Justice and allegations that Epstein and his associate, Ghislaine Maxwell, used Interlochen to "prey on girls." Epstein died by suicide in 2019 while awaiting trial on federal sex trafficking charges stemming from claims of sexual abuse involving girls as young as 14.

In December, the Department of Justice's release of thousands of files related to a years-long investigation of Epstein included a lawsuit that claimed he met his first known underage sexual abuse victim at Interlochen in the 1990s.

In a letter sent last week to Tsernoglou, DeBoyer said allegations of sexual misconduct, abuse or institutional wrongdoing are more of a matter for law enforcement. He also noted that, in the spring of 2024, Interlochen hired an outside Massachusetts law firm, Sanghavi Law Office, to investigate any allegations of misconduct related to Epstein's ties to the music school.

"Given the sensitive nature of the allegations and the possibility that criminal or civil proceedings could arise from the findings of that investigation, it is important that the Legislature avoid actions that could unintentionally interfere with or complicate that process," DeBoyer said in the May 14 letter.

In a statement Tuesday, Interlochen Center for the Arts said the Sanghavi review remains ongoing and that the fine arts school encourages anyone impacted by Epstein to speak with those investigators.

"Interlochen will respond to any additional inquiries from elected officials or oversight bodies as appropriate," said Maureen Oleson, a spokeswoman for the school. "The safety and well-being of our students will always be our highest priority."

COUNCIL

From page A1

entire territory," Hosley alleged. "Over the last two years, it's gone from three women and six men to two women and seven men and now, with this appointment it would go to one woman and eight men which is not representative of our community."

City Attorney Dave Eberle said the planning commission appointments do not raise concern regarding the state law.

"I am concerned that this just doesn't convey engagement of our community, especially when there are more applicants than there are positions and then one applicant is then provided to be allowed to sit on two boards," Hosley said. "Appointing people to multiple boards when there are multiple applicants for those boards is disengaging of the community and is not bringing diversity to the board that could be brought."

Regardless of Hosiery's protest, the council approved all of the board and commission appointments.

Master plan

The city council approved the updates made to the city's master plan.

In the Sept. 15 meeting, the city council reviewed and voted against adopting the proposed master plan, citing three main concerns that were to be addressed in the statement of rejection.

The statements of rejection included:

■ The master plan provide additional guidance regarding the Manufactured Housing Community (MHC) land use and zoning district. Specifically, that language be added to clarify that the MHC would not be an appropriate land use in areas with environmental contamination without proper remediation proposed, any MHC land use must be compatible with the surrounding area and that maps 9-16 related to coastal resilience be considered in any decision to rezone property to MHC.

■ The future land use map designation for the property at the corner of North Shore Drive and Oak Court (specifically 89 North Shore Drive, Bunde's Bakery) be changed from commercial to multi-family.

■ Additional language be incorporated into the master plan to specify that the property on Baseline Road (commonly referred to as 120 Baseline) has been identified as an area where residential land use is appropriate for single-family homes or attached residential dwellings and not resorts, specifically workforce and missing middle housing, would be most appropriate.

Beginning in March of 2024, the planning commission began the process of updating the city's master plan.

The plan was rewritten in 2018 and in December of 2023 the city council accepted a grant from the Michigan Coastal Management Program to update the plan with a resilient, coastal community lens.

Other items

Council members approved the city council priorities for 2026-27.

The priorities include lifeguards, short-term rentals, housing and medical/urgent care.

Later, the city council approved the appointment of Brittany Abrams as the new city clerk, who will start June 8.

City council held a public hearing regarding the 2026-27 budget, which will be brought back for approval at the next meeting.

The city council approved the special event the Fourth of July parade, to be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on July 4, starting from Elkenburg Street at the South Haven High School, using Kalamazoo, Phoenix and Center streets for the parade route.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

SUMMER

From page A1

Parks and cemeteries

■ Seasonal parks and cemetery staff are preparing public spaces for the summer season.

■ Residents and visitors who encounter issues with public restrooms, parks or cemeteries are encouraged to contact the Department of Public Works at 269-637-0737.

■ Weekend or after hour concerns may be directed to the South Haven Information Center at 269-637-5151.

Marinas

■ Boaters interested in booking transient slips at Southside Marina may call the Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources at 800-44-PARKS or reserve online at midnrreservations.com.

■ Marina staff may be reached at 269-637-3171 or shmarina@southhavenmi.gov.

BLACKMON

From page A1

"We are thrilled to welcome Alloyd to the board of trustees," LMC Board Chair John Grover said in a news release. "Her deep roots in our community, her commitment to youth development, and her decades of professional experience make her an exceptional addition to the board. We look forward to her contributions as we continue to serve students and the Southwest Michigan region."

Blackmon, who is set to finish the remainder of Smith's term that ends this year, will begin her service on the board immediately.

Contact: twittkowski@TheHP.com, 932-0358.

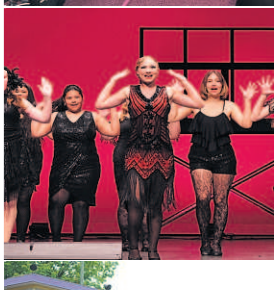
Al-Van Humane Society
Adopt ♥ Volunteer ♥ Donate ♥ Advocate
73303 8th Ave. PO Box 421 South Haven, MI 49090
phone 269.637.5062 fax 269.639.2242
Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pets of the Week, Stu!
Stu is a 2-year-old cat with a goofy personality, a lot to say, and absolutely no interest in blending into the background. This affectionate guy loves being the center of attention and will happily let you know when he thinks you should be paying more attention to him. (Which is often.) If you're looking for a cat who will keep you company, keep you laughing, and make himself right at home, Stu is ready to meet you.
Submit an adoption survey at al-van.org/adopt!

South Haven Pet Mayor Fundraiser
Nominations have started for the inaugural Pet Mayor of South Haven fundraiser! If you think your pet has what it takes to run the town, you can enter them with a $20 donation. As part of the nomination, you'll submit a photo and come up with a fun campaign slogan to help them stand out. Nominations will be open through May 11th, after which voting will begin, allowing the community to support their favorite candidates through donations.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST
Laundry Detergent, 13 Gallon Trash Bags, Medium/Large Latex Gloves, Paper Towels

SOUTH HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
YOUR SCHOOL OF CHOICE



OPEN ENROLLMENT
June 1st – June 12th

Lincoln Elem.
JK/K: Unlimited
1st GR: 3 openings
2nd GR: 6 openings
3rd GR: 1 opening

Maple Grove Elem.
K: Unlimited
1st GR: 3 openings
2nd GR: 4 openings
3rd GR: 0 openings

North Shore Elem.
4th GR: 6 openings
5th GR: 6 openings

Baseline Middle School
6th GR: 3 openings
7th GR: 3 openings
8th GR: 0 openings

SH High School
9th GR: 5 openings
10th GR: 5 openings
11th GR: 0 openings
12th GR: 0 openings

OPEN for enrollment of non-resident students under Section 105 and 105c (Schools of Choice). Please see traditional school year grade openings (above).
ENROLL NOW!
Administration Building: 554 Green Street | www.shps.org > Enrollment > Enrollment Information
PH: (269) 637-0500 | enrollment@shps.org

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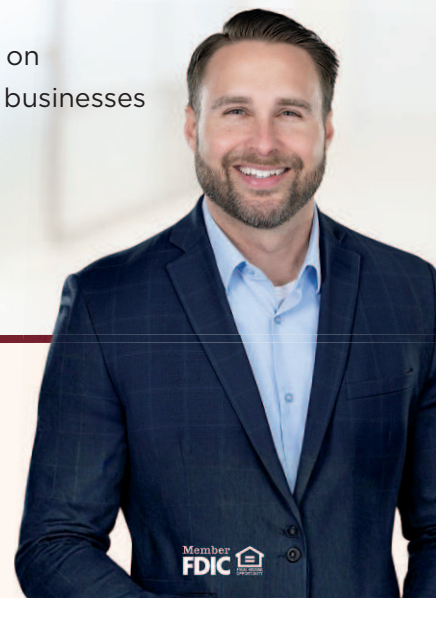

Students arrested for beach incidents

Police respond to Jean Klock Park, Silver Beach crowds

By TONY WITTKOWSKI
HP Local News Editor
and LOUISE WREGE
HP Staff Writer

Several teenagers from out of state were arrested and issued citations Monday following a disturbance at Silver Beach County Park in St. Joseph and later, a shooting at Jean Klock Park in Benton Harbor.

Berrien County sheriff deputies were called at 3:28 p.m. Monday to break up a large crowd of mostly high school students, who were reportedly participating in "senior skip day" from South Bend and Mishawaka, Ind.

Officers responded to loud music, disorderly behavior and people dancing on their vehicles.

Law enforcement from the Berrien County Sheriff's Office and St. Joseph Department of Public Safety issued and made 12 arrest citations for alcohol violations; two arrest citations for marijuana possession; three arrest citations for loud music violations; and two arrests for resisting and obstructing police.

Berrien County Sheriff Chuck Heit said about 150 students were involved in the disturbance and ordered to leave the county park by police. He said the scene was cleared around 6:30 p.m. Monday.

"Dealing with them took a couple hours and we made the decision to remove them," Heit said Tuesday. "With the new ordinance, we gave them the chance to leave without closing down the beach. The St. Joseph Department of Public Safety was a great partner and involved jointly with curtailing the disturbance."

Jean Klock Park

Benton Harbor Director of Public Safety Dan McGinnis said his department was blindsided when many of the people from Indiana who were kicked out of Silver Beach moved to Jean Klock Park.

"When I arrived on scene, there were so many cars, I was really in shock, like, 'Why are all these cars here?' We don't have – this time of year or day – this many cars and this many youth to be out here at Jean Klock," McGinnis recalled Tuesday.

Every person who officers made contact with at Jean Klock were from Indiana, including a 15-year-old teen who was shot in the leg and taken to the hospital. McGinnis said he was unsure of the victim's condition.

"Not one single person was from Benton Harbor," he said. "Everyone was from Indiana. The people we arrested were from Indiana. We got three stolen guns from Indiana."

He said two people were arrested when stolen guns were found in a car at the scene.

McGinnis said they received great help from the sheriff's department and the Benton Township Police Department, so Jean Klock could be locked down while the scene was processed.

He said people from Indiana coming to the area and causing trouble has become a disturbing trend in Berrien County.

"For the past three to four years, there's been problems at Silver Beach and every year, it's always been people from out of town and now it's come here," McGinnis said.

In addition, he said a shooting a couple of years ago in Benton Township involved someone from Indiana.

Contact: twittkowski@TheHP.com, 932-0358.

Michigan Maritime Museum to host Free Fun Fest on June 6

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The Michigan Maritime Museum will be hosting its 2nd annual Free Fun Fest on June 6.

According to a news release, the free, high-energy waterfront celebration filled with hands-on activities, live demonstrations and family fun will take place from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

A free city-wide shuttle will run throughout the day with stops at the South Haven Senior Center, South Haven City Hall and the museum. The shuttle will run from 8 am to 4 pm to include the Krusin' with Kylie Car Show.

Free Fun Fest is made possible through the collaboration of local businesses and organizations, including: the City of South Haven, Visit South Haven, Destination Paw Paw, the South Haven Fire Department, the South Haven Police Department, South Haven Public Schools and the Michigan Maritime Museum.

"The Museum campus at 260 Dyckman Avenue will come alive with interactive experiences for all ages," the release stated. "Guests can explore emergency vehicles up close, test their skills on a ninja obstacle course, enjoy robotics demonstrations and participate in hands-on learning stations celebrating Great Lakes history and science."

New and returning highlights include:

- Limited free boat rides offering a rare chance to get out on the water.
- Dockside tours of the historic tall ship Friends Good Will, the Museum's flagship vessel.
- More than a dozen carnival-style game booths including Shootin' Hoops, Sailor Knots, Games of Chance, Disc Golf and more.
- A Fairy Forest Walk, Giant Dino Dig, lawn bowling and arcade-style games.
- A library book giveaway and interactive learning challenges.
- Complimentary ice cream and root beer for guests.

"Inside the Museum, exhibits will be open for exploration, while outside, the waterfront becomes a vibrant hub of activity," the release stated.

Food and raffle tickets will be available for purchase for $1 each (cash only).

"Free Fun Fest reflects the Michigan Maritime Museum's commitment to accessible, engaging education and meaningful community connection, bringing together partners, families, and visitors to celebrate the spirit of South Haven and its rich maritime heritage," the release stated.

For more information, go to MichiganMaritimeMuseum.org or follow the museum on social media for event updates.

Health in Harmony.
125 years ago, Bronson began with a promise. What started as one hospital has grown into a symphony of care - each milestone adding a new note, each team strengthening the harmony. Across southwest Michigan, our hospitals, providers and teams move in step, guided by one mission: the health of our communities.
This anniversary is more than a celebration; it's a reaffirmation. Through innovation, investment and an unwavering commitment to safety, we continue to strengthen every hospital and community we serve because world-class care should always be in harmony, and never far from home.
Bronson | Health in Harmony | 125 Years Strong
bronsonhealth.com/125
BRONSON

Visit us online at www.southhaventribune.net

Matching grant opportunity for new SH dog park

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Bark Park recently received a significant boost from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation as it seeks to conclude its capital campaign for the park development by mid-July.

According to a news release, new public spaces across Michigan are being created with the support of the Public Spaces Community Places crowdgranting program.

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation recently announced eight projects for the spring and summer of 2026, including the South Haven Bark Park at Riverwoods Recreation Park.

Every dollar given to the campaign will be matched during the 60-day appeal period from May 18 through July 17.

If the new South Haven Bark Park receives $50,000 during this period, it will win a $50,000 matching grant from the corporation with funds made possible through the public spaces program.

"The opportunity that the MEDC crowdgranting program is offering to our effort to develop the new South Haven dog park is significant," Local Project Director Robert Linstrom said in the release. "Since the late fall of 2025, the South Haven area community has responded with enthusiasm to our grass roots effort to raise $180,000 to fully fund the new South Haven Bark Park at Riverwoods. This MEDC matching grant program will take us over the top as we develop the new Bark Park in the spring and summer of 2026."

The South Haven Dog Park is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that has teamed up with the South Haven Area Recreation Authority (SHARA) to transform five acres of the emerging Riverwoods Recreation Park into a wooded and fully fenced-in free municipal dog park.

Photo provided

The South Haven Bark Park will be part of the new Riverwoods Recreation Park.

"The Bark Park site has been prepared, the fence line has been marked, and work is underway on the excavation, water hookups, installation of deluxe dog water stations and more in preparation for the fencing phase of the project in the weeks ahead," the release stated.

The Bark Park at Riverwoods will be a combination of open areas for dogs to run and a beautifully wooded campus for both large and small dog park areas.

"Not only do these placemaking projects transform underutilized space but they create well-loved and well-used public spaces for generations to come, resulting in more vibrant communities across the state," MEDC Managing Director Regional Development Paula Holtz said in the release. "We are proud to provide resources for these efforts through our Public Spaces Community Places program."

100 percent of donations given to the South Haven Bark Park at Riverwoods will be used exclusively for dog park development and all gifts are tax deductible.

Donations can be made at patronicity.com/SHBarkPark and will be matched during the 60-day appeal period from May 18 through July 17.

Donors can make their check payable to "South Haven Dog Park" and mail it to 823 Superior Street, South Haven, MI 49090 or go to the website to make electronic donations.

For questions, contact Project Director Robert Linstrom at 269-906-0532.

Photos provided

South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Jo Marie Massage as a new chamber member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

Jo Marie Massage brings spa-level services to South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Jo Marie Massage as a new chamber member.

According to a news release, Jo Marie Massage offers elevated, spa-level bodywork in a calm, private setting designed to help clients relax and reset.

"Joanna, Licensed Massage Therapist and Certified Manual Lymphatic Drainage practitioner, brings over a decade of experience in therapeutic bodywork," the release stated.

She specializes in Swedish, Deep Tissue, Hot Stone massage and Manual Lymphatic Drainage using the Vodder method, with each session customized to meet the needs of every client.

"Jo Marie Massage was founded in 2023 from a deep belief that massage should be more than a luxury, it should be a restorative, intuitive experience that helps people reconnect with themselves," the release stated.

After more than a decade providing in-home massage therapy in Chicago, Ill., Joanna relocated to Southwest Michigan, where she continued her work in local spas and chiropractic clinics while building a personal clientele.

Jo Marie Massage specializes in Swedish, Deep Tissue, Hot Stone massage and Manual Lymphatic Drainage.

"Now based in South Haven, she is proud to offer a calming, high-quality experience for both residents and visitors," the release stated. "Her goal with every session is to bring balance, renewal and lasting results helping clients leave feeling supported, restored and cared for."

Jo Marie Massage is a solo-practitioner practice located within the business center on Broadway Street in South Haven.

Couples massage may be available by request and must be scheduled several days in advance, as availability depends on securing a second licensed massage therapist and cannot be guaranteed. Select on-site massage services may also be available for vacation stays.

Year-round residents and visitors seeking personalized wellness and restorative care are welcome at Jo Marie Massage.

Appointments may be requested by calling 224-492-5383.

Clarinetist and violinist offer free concert in South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Clarinetist Andrea Cheeseman and violinist Nancy Bargerstock will present a free concert of duos in South Haven.

According to a news release, the concert will take place at 7:30 p.m. on June 12 at the First United Methodist Church, located at 429 Michigan Ave.

Dr. Cheeseman, a South Haven native, recently returned to the area and works as a private lesson teacher.

Previously, she was a freelance musician in Columbia, S.C. and served on the faculties of Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C. and Delta State University Cleveland, Miss.

She has been a featured artist at prominent festivals of electroacoustic music, including: Third Practice Electroacoustic Music Festival, Electroacoustic Music Midwest and the Electroacoustic Barn Dance. Cheeseman earned a Bachelor of Music degree at Ithaca College and her Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts at Michigan State University.

"While she is a specialist in performing contemporary music for clarinet and bass clarinet, she is an equally avid performer of chamber music," the release stated.

Dr. Bargerstock is Professor Emerita of Violin at Appalachian State University. In 2016, she was honored with the UNC Board of Governors Excellence in Teaching Award.

Prior to coming to Appalachian State in 1999, she resided in Greece where she held the positions of assistant concertmaster of the Athens State Orchestra and Artist-Teacher at the American College in Athens.

Bargerstock earned a bachelor's degree and master's degree in violin performance from the Juilliard School, Soloist Diploma in viola from the Orfeo Conservatory in Athens, Greece, and DMA from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

She appeared across the US, Europe and the Far East as a soloist and chamber musician in major venues including London Proms, Kennedy Center, Tokyo's Pablo Casals, Carnegie and Boston Symphony Halls, and festivals of Craftsbury, Bellingham, Bermuda, Athens, Corfu, Cyprus and Santorini.

While Cheeseman and Bargerstock were members of the Hayes School of Music faculty at Appalachian State, they collaborated regularly. Their longstanding musical partnership brings a sense of ease and personal connection to their performances.

"Nancy is one of the smartest and most enthusiastic musicians I've had the pleasure of collaborating with," Cheeseman said in the release. "I am pleased she will be here and am excited to introduce Nancy to our community."

The program will feature a diverse selection of works spanning multiple eras and styles, including music by Georg Friedrich Fuchs, Rebecca Clarke and Roberto Sierra, alongside prominent composers such as Bach, Brahms, Grainger and Bartók.

The concert is free. However, donations will be accepted to support FUMC ministries and artist travel.

For more information, contact Andrea Cheeseman at alcheeseman@gmail.com.

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0900 LEGALS

Meeting Synopsis Casco Township Board Meeting
Monday, May 18th, 7:00 PM
CALL TO ORDER: Overhiser called the meeting to order at 7:00.
PRESENT: Overhiser, Clevenger, Ridley, Fleming, & Campbell
ABSENT: None
ITEMS APPROVED: Minutes from 4/20/26
Al-Van contract
Budget Workshop Date; June 3rd at 5:00 PM
EMC Insurance proposal
SHAWSA Re-appointment of Ron Wise
Employee background checks
Tree work at Casco Nature Preserve by Fleming Tree Service
PM Blough Five Year Parks & Recreation Master plan update
ADJOURNMENT: 8:21 PM
Allan Overhiser, Casco Supervisor Rachel Ridley, Casco Clerk

0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
36TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
Van Buren COUNTY

CASE NO & JUDGE
2026-075681-DO
Hon. Judge Susan Metzger

ORDER REGARDING ALTERNATE SERVICE

Court address:
212 E. Paw Paw St.,
Paw Paw, MI 49079
Court phone no.
(269)657-8200

Robin Seltenreich
Plaintiff(s).

Wesley Todd (P74571)
136 E. Michigan Ave., Ste 800
Kalamazoo, MI 49007
(269)267-1655
Plaintiff's Attorney

V.

James Seltenreich
935B Phoenix St.
South Haven, MI 49090
Defendant(s).

THE COURT FINDS:
Service of process upon the defendant, James Seltenreich cannot reasonably be made as provided in MCR 2.105, and service of process may be made in a manner that is reasonably calculated to give the defendant actual notice of the proceedings and an opportunity to be heard.
IT IS ORDERED:
Service of the summons and complaint Order re: Alternate Service and a copy of this order shall be made by the following method(s).: First class mail and tacking or firmly affixing to the door at 935B Phoenix St. South Haven, MI 49090. Publishing for three consecutive weeks in the Van Buren County Legal News pursuant to MCR 2.106. For each method used, proof of service must be filed promptly with the court.
/s/ Susan Metzger, 05/04/2026

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Cindi Compton, REALTOR®
Cell: 269-214-2459
cindicomptonrealtor@gmail.com
513 Broadway Street, South Haven, MI 49090

SOUTH HAVEN CHARTER TOWNSHIP SYNOPSIS
REGULAR MEETING MAY 13, 2026

PRESENT: Poole, Wiatrowski, Fisher, Bertorelli, Stein, and DeGrandchamp
ABSENT: Lewandowski
Motion to approve April 8, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes.
Firefighter Zach Kenreich gave a report for SHAES. Gail Gladney gave a report for VBCounty Commission.
Motion to approve the Agenda with the addition of New Business 8.H.
Motion to approve Resolution 26-12 To Adopt Ordinance 174 to Amend Ordinance 172 changing the Pilot rate.
Motion to approve Resolution 26-13 To Adopt Ordinance 173 to Amend Ordinance 167 changing the language on the Pilot.
Motion to approve Resolution 26-14 To allow Treasurer's office to discontinue accepting credit cards.
Motion to approve a Short-Term Rental Inspection Program Agreement with SHAES.
Motion to approve an Agreement with Al-Van Humane Society and increase support.
Motion to appoint Sandy Starland to the Library Board.
Motion to appoint Ross Stein to the SHAWSA Board retroactive to February 14th.
Reports were received. W.C.Askew from the Road Commission was in attendance.
Motion to approve payment of $82,000.00 to SHARA, to be repaid in July, for boardwalk on the Porter Property.
Motion to approve payment of bills in the amount of $168,619.15.
Motion to approve Resolution 26-15 amending the Budget.
Meeting was adjourned at 8:36 p.m.
Respectfully submitted, Brenda Bertorelli, Clerk

CASCO TOWNSHIP, ALLEGAN COUNTY
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the Zoning Board of Appeals of Casco Township will conduct a public hearing and regular meeting on Thursday June 11, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. at the Casco Township Hall, 7104 107th Ave, South Haven, MI 49090, within the Township.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that the item to be considered at said public hearing include the following:

Michael and Laura Bourgon have petitioned for variances to remove and rebuild front and side deck in the same footprint at 7276 Lincoln Steet, 0302-570-109-00. Required side setback is 10 feet; request is for 7 feet of relief (to be 3ft from property line). Required front setback is 15ft (3.23B uncovered deck may project 10ft into front setback); request 4ft of relief (to be 11ft from front property line).

Matthew Stagner and Lisa Lombard have petitioned for variances to remove and rebuild front and side deck in the same footprint at 7274 Lincoln Steet, 0302-570-110-00. Required side setback is

10 feet; request is for 7 feet of relief (to be 3ft from property line). Required front setback is 15ft (3.23B uncovered deck may project 10ft into front setback); request 4ft of relief (to be 11ft from front property line).

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that the application packet can be reviewed at the Casco Township Hall during regular business hours at 7104 107th Ave, South Haven or by contacting the Zoning Administrator for an electronic copy 1-800-626-5964 mtsallegan@frontier.com

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that written comments may be submitted to the Township Clerk at the Township Hall, by mail, to address below, or email to the zoning administrator mtsallegan@frontier.com. All written comments must be submitted no later than 5:00pm the day preceding the public hearing (Wed June 10, 5pm).

Casco Township will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services to individuals with disabilities at the hearing upon seven (7) days' notice to the Casco Township Clerk.

Rachel Ridley
Casco Township Clerk
7104 107th Ave, South Haven MI 49090
269-637-4441

Tasha Smalley
Zoning Administrator
1-800-626-5964

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CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF SOUTH HAVEN

NOTICE OF ADOPTION OF ORDINANCE NO. 173
AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND ORDINANCE TO PROVIDE FOR A SERVICE CHARGE IN LIEU OF TAXES FOR DWELLING UNITS FOR LOW INCOME PERSONS OR FAMILIES (SUNSET GROVE)

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that at its meeting May 13, 2026, the Township Board adopted Ordinance No.173 "An Ordinance to Amend Ordinance to Provide For A Service Charge In Lieu of Taxes for Dwelling Units for Low Income Persons and Families (Sunset Grove)." The following is a summary of the Ordinance. A true copy of the Ordinance is available for inspection or purchase at the office of the Township Clerk, 09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy, South Haven, MI 49090, or online at http://www.southhaventwp.com. The Ordinance takes effect following publication.

ORDINANCE NO. 173
ORDINANCE TO AMEND ORDINANCE TO PROVIDE FOR A SERVICE CHARGE IN LIEU OF TAXES FOR DWELLING UNITS FOR LOW INCOME PERSONS AND FAMILIES (LIGHTHOUSE RIDGE APARTMENTS)

Section 1. Amendment. Section 6 of Ordinance To Provide For A Service Charge In Lieu Of Taxes For Dwelling Units For Low Income Persons And Families (Sunset Grove) is amended to add the Authority as a third-party beneficiary to the Township's contract with Samaritas Affordable Living Sunset Grove LDHA LP.

Section 2. Severability. The Ordinance's provisions are severable.

Section 3. Repealer. All ordinances or parts of ordinances that conflict with the Ordinance are repealed to the extent necessary to give the Ordinance full force and effect.

Section 4. Effective Date. The Ordinance takes effect following publication.

Brenda Bertorelli, Clerk
South Haven Township Hall
09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy
South Haven, MI 49090
(269) 637-3305

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF SOUTH HAVEN

NOTICE OF ADOPTION OF ORDINANCE NO. 174
AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND ORDINANCE TO PROVIDE FOR A SERVICE CHARGE IN LIEU OF TAXES FOR DWELLING UNITS FOR LOW INCOME PERSONS OR FAMILIES (LIGHTHOUSE RIDGE APARTMENTS)

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that at its meeting May 13, 2026, the Township Board adopted Ordinance No.174 "An Ordinance to Amend Ordinance to Provide For A Service Charge In Lieu of Taxes for Dwelling Units for Low Income Persons and Families (Lighthouse Ridge Apartments)." The following is a summary of the Ordinance. A true copy of the Ordinance is available for inspection or purchase at the office of the Township Clerk, 09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy, South Haven, MI 49090, or online at http://www.southhaventwp.com. The Ordinance takes effect following publication.

ORDINANCE NO. 174
ORDINANCE TO AMEND ORDINANCE TO PROVIDE FOR A SERVICE CHARGE IN LIEU OF TAXES FOR DWELLING UNITS FOR LOW INCOME PERSONS AND FAMILIES (LIGHTHOUSE RIDGE APARTMENTS)

Section 1. Amendment. Section 4 of Ordinance To Provide For A Service Charge In Lieu Of Taxes For Dwelling Units For Low Income Persons And Families is amended to change the annual service charge in the last sentence of the section from 4% to 1% of the Annual Shelter Rent actually collected removes Section 9 of the Ordinance in its entirety.

Section 2. Severability. The Ordinance's provisions are severable.

Section 3. Repealer. All ordinances or parts of ordinances that conflict with the Ordinance are repealed to the extent necessary to give the Ordinance full force and effect.

Section 4. Effective Date. The Ordinance takes effect following publication.

Brenda Bertorelli, Clerk
South Haven Township Hall
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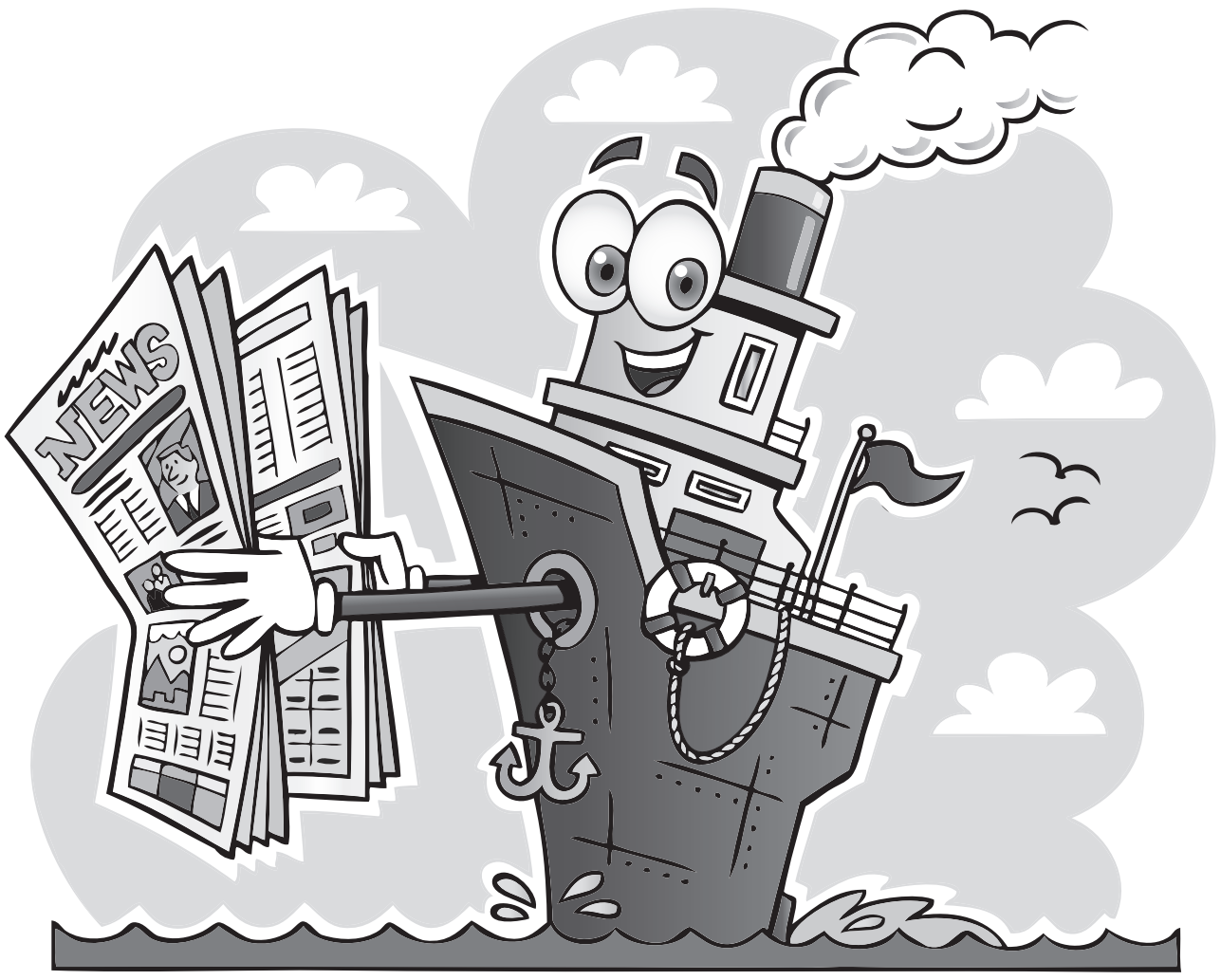

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9 to 10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

South Haven Memorial Library: Bridge Card Game from 1 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday. Open to the public. Beginners are welcome.

Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for students grades 6 through 12 every Monday from 3 to 5 p.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: May 1 through 31 "Deep In the Branches" (by 2026 Bailey Fall Conference Keynote Speaker Danae Wolfe) StoryWalk

South Haven Farmers Market: Open from 8 a.m. to 2pm on Saturdays, from May to October; and on Wednesdays from June through August.

May

24 – South Haven Area Emergency Services: Sit down/ drive-thru pancake breakfast from 7:30 to 11 a.m. at 90 Bluestar Hwy. South Haven, MI.

26 – Rotary Club: Morning meeting. Presentation will be South Haven High School Principal Amy Cockburn.

27 – South Haven Memorial Library: Friends of the South Haven library meeting from 2 to 3 p.m.

28 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: Starting at 6 p.m. "Taking Time to be Present" with Jodi Henley | Find Your Path LLC. Feeling overwhelmed with your responsibilities? Losing sense of who you are? Looking for ways to reground and recenter? Join us for an hour or so of slow walking and gentle, guided meditative activities to help you feel present and connected to the world and your place in it.

29 – South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafe from 11 a.m. to noon.

30 – South Haven Memorial Library: Musical Storybook at 11 a.m.

30-31 – Michigan Flywheelers Museum: Kingdom of Wonders Medieval Circus performances at 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.

June

2 – Scott Club: "Questions on the Amazon" in person at Scott Club, 652 Phoenix Street, and on Zoom at 1 p.m.

4 – South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce: Tiki Luau Annual Celebration and Business Excellence Awards beginning at 5 p.m. at the South Haven Moose Lodge. Tickets cost $45 per person. RSVP required by May 22.

5 – South Haven Memorial Library: Play-Doh Play Date at 11 a.m.

6 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Free Fun Fest from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

8 – South Haven Garden Club: regular meeting with Plant Bingo. Social time begins at 12:30 p.m., meeting begins at 1 p.m.

9 – Rotary Club: Morning meeting. Presentation will be by Nicholas Dalton on Rural Development Enterprise as Economic/Business Development.

9-11 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: Bailey's Nature Buddies from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Registration is open.

10 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

12 – First United Methodist Church: Concert of duos featuring clarinetist Andrea Cheeseman and violinist Nancy Bargerstock at 7:30 p.m.

15-19 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: Bailey's Budding Naturalists week one. Online registration is open. Campers can register for one or both weeks.

16 – Scott Club: Annual Membership Meeting and Luncheon at Senior Services, 08337 M-140, South Haven. No Zoom. RSVP is required via email at info@scottclub.org.

20 – South Haven Theatre Series: "Michiganderish" written and performed by Julie Ganey at 7:30 p.m. at Listiak Auditorium. Tickets cost $15 with free admission for students.

22-26 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: Bailey's Budding Naturalists week two. Online registration is open. Campers can register for one or both weeks.

24 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

26 – South Haven Performance Series: The Lincoln Trio to perform at 7 p.m. at First United Methodist Church, 429 Michigan Ave. Admission is $15 and free for students.

27 – First Hebrew Congregation of South Haven: Tot Shabbat at the South Haven Memorial Library from 5 to 6 p.m..

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Two governor candidates should be disqualified, Mich. election officials say

By CRAIG MAUGER
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING — The Michigan Bureau of Elections recommended Wednesday that two candidates for governor and one U.S. Senate hopeful be disqualified from the August primary ballot for submitting an insufficient number of petition signatures.

While the most well-known candidates in the races met the signature threshold, Republican Ralph Rebandt and Democrat Kim Thomas, who were running for governor, and Republican Bernadette Smith, who was running for Senate, didn't hit the 15,000 signature standard, according to state election officials.

Rebandt, a longtime Oakland County pastor who now resides in Elmira, submitted 18,214 signatures, just 3,214 above the 15,000 required of candidates for governor.

The bureau sampled 750 signatures. He needed 618 of them to be valid to make the Aug. 4 ballot. However, only 533 of them were found to be valid. Of the 217 signatures ruled out, 110 came from people who weren't registered to vote, 36 didn't match the signature on file with the state, and 22 listed the voter at an invalid city or township.

Rebandt, who ran for governor in 2022 and finished in fifth place in the GOP primary, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Board of State Canvassers will decide on May 28 whether to agree with the Bureau of Elections' analysis and officially disqualify Rebandt.

There are four other Republican candidates for governor: former Attorney General Mike Cox of Livonia, U.S. Rep. John James of Shelby Township, businessman Perry Johnson of Bloomfield Hills and state Senate Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt of Porter Township.

As for Thomas of Battle Creek, the bureau found "hundreds of signatures of dubious authenticity and sheets showing clear indications of fraud," according to its report.

Thomas needed 690 of her 750 sampled signatures to be valid, but only 60 were deemed valid.

If Thomas is disqualified next week by the canvassing board, two Democrats would make the August primary ballot: Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson of Detroit and Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson of Fenton.

In the U.S. Senate race, only Smith of Byron Center was recommended for disqualification. She submitted 6,932 signatures but needed 15,000, according to the Bureau of Elections.

Smith's disqualification would clear the Republican primary field for former U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers of White Lake Township.

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Firefighters leave after putting out a major house fire on Prospect avenue on Dec. 28, 2017, in the Bronx borough of New York City. Over 170 firefighters respond to the evening fire in which at least 12 persons were killed with others injured.
Amir Levy / Getty Images / TNS

When the helpers 'feel helpless'

First responders get a boost in mental health support

By AMANDA WATFORD
Stateline.org (TNS)

Ty Wooten didn't realize the weight of answering his first 911 call – until more than a decade later.

A woman had dialed 911 to report that her husband had shot himself in front of her and their 7-year-old son, on the family's living room couch. It was Wooten's first call as a dispatcher.

"I wasn't prepared for that, and I didn't quite realize how difficult that call was for me for several years," said Wooten, who has worked in the 911 industry for more than 30 years, both taking calls and managing dispatch centers.

He is now director of government affairs for the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch, an industry group that helps set standards for emergency dispatch centers.

Wooten pushed the experience aside. It wasn't until about 15 years later, while swapping stories with colleagues, that the details came rushing back – triggering a spiral of anxiety, panic attacks and depression that would take time to fully confront.

"I had taken that experience and kind of put it in the corner of my mind, and built a wall around it so I wouldn't think about it again," Wooten said.

Wooten's experience reflects a broader reality for first responders, who are routinely exposed to traumatic events but often lack the space – or support – to process them.

Across the country, state and local officials are increasingly looking for ways to change that, expanding mental health resources and testing new approaches aimed at reducing stigma and improving access to care for 911 dispatchers, police officers, firefighters, paramedics and emergency medical technicians.

Research suggests that first responders face higher rates of trauma-related mental health challenges than the general public, with repeated exposure increasing the risk of post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety. That strain has also been linked to burnout, and to higher rates of substance use and suicidal ideation.

Some policing experts say untreated trauma and stigma around mental health don't just harm police officers – they can also ripple outward, influencing split-second decisions on the street and the quality of encounters with the public.

"It's not just a personal and individual tragedy. It's also potentially going to have a direct consequence for how officers treat those they encounter on duty," said Heidi Bonner, a criminal justice and criminology professor at East Carolina University.

At the same time, rising health care costs and concerns about affordability have made access to mental health services more difficult for many nationwide. Some communities are already experimenting with new approaches for first responders.

In Brevard County, Florida, some first responders now have access to therapy dogs, peer-to-peer counseling and confidential hotlines. Florida state officials last year also announced they were developing a more coordinated, statewide mental health program for first responders.

In Virginia, Henrico County firefighters gained access to a new app that allows them to seek mental health support anonymously. They are one of the first departments in the country to use the platform. Some experts say anonymity can help reduce barriers tied to stigma and fear of professional consequences.

Expanding options

Even as awareness grows, many first responders still don't seek help – a gap that policymakers and local agencies are increasingly trying to address.

"You're going to see something horrible, and the expectation is, 'Yeah, that's what we do – you just got to deal with it,'" said Alanna Badgley, a paramedic in New York. Badgley also is the EMS external affairs coordinator for the International Association of EMTs and Paramedics.

"Bringing up if you were feeling some kind of way might have been seen as a sign of weakness, or that you weren't cut out for the job, so a lot of people would kind of hide it," she said, describing what the culture was like when she started in emergency medicine in 2010.

She added that there's now a growing recognition that first responders need to be honest about their mental health and seek support early and often.

Many agencies or departments offer employee assistance programs, or EAPs, which provide confidential counseling and support services for employees dealing with personal or work-related stress, but some first responders may hesitate to use them.

"A lot of first responders worry about the potential for their employer to know what's going on if they go through their EAP," Badgley said.

A 2025 survey by the National Emergency Number Association found that nearly 70 percent of telecommunicators reported feeling stress before every shift, with fatigue and anxiety among the most common symptoms.

In recent years, states and municipalities say they're focusing on reducing barriers to care, including affordability.

"We will pay whatever it takes for someone to get help," said Tom Synan, the police chief of the Newtown Police Department in Ohio. Synan also is a speaker with the nonprofit Law Enforcement Action Partnership.

"I think that's what's going to help first responders have long careers, better home life and better service to the community," he added.

State efforts

In New York, state officials launched an online training program in March to help mental health professionals better understand and support first responders, with a focus on responder culture and barriers to care.

New Jersey Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy in January signed into law a measure that provides employment protections for first responders diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, barring retaliation and guaranteeing they can return to their jobs once cleared. The law is already in effect.

In Nebraska, Republican Gov. Jim Pillen in April signed into law a bill that shields peer support conversations from being used in court or disciplinary proceedings.

Minnesota legislators are considering a proposal to allow first responders to access donated mental health services, including counseling and peer support, without violating state gift laws.

And in Missouri, lawmakers have advancedlegislation to study alternative therapies, including the psychoactive compounds psilocybin and ibogaine, for treating conditions such as depression, substance use and post-traumatic stress, with first responders and military veterans eligible to participate in supervised studies.

Other states have taken similar steps in recent years. Last year, Ohio lawmakers approved $40 million for a PTSD treatment fund, while Texas is developing a statewide peer support network for firefighters and EMS personnel.

Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Utah and Washington have enacted laws to protect the confidentiality of peer support counseling. Lawmakers in Vermont are considering similar legislation this year that would ensure conversations in peer support groups remain confidential for first responders.

Still, advocates say access alone does not guarantee use – particularly when providers may not fully understand the realities of the job.

"The trauma is so unique," Badgley said. "It's hard to feel comfortable confiding in somebody who just really isn't trauma informed, or doesn't understand the first responder mentality."

Some first responders say the mental health strain of the job goes beyond exposure to traumatic calls. It's often shaped just as much by internal and external pressures, including workplace dynamics, public expectations, staffing shortages and required overtime, and stressors from life outside the job.

The combination can leave first responders struggling to process their stress.

"When you feel helpless – and you're the person who helps – who do you go to?" said Synan, the Newtown police chief.

Synan said his department has worked to create space for those conversations, holding debriefs after difficult calls and encouraging officers to talk through what they experienced without pressure or judgment.

A culture slow to change

When now-retired firefighter Frank Leto joined the New York City Fire Department in 1983, mental health support barely existed.

"The mental health support at that point was probably drinks after work," he said.

The expectation was to absorb whatever you saw and move on – until, as Leto put it, "You just stuffed it down until it started taking things from you: your family, your relationships, your health, eventually your job."

That code of silence began to break after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001.

"There was really no option for the fire department to not address the mental health needs of our firefighters and their families," Leto said.

He moved off the line to help expand the department's counseling unit and its early peer support efforts, but their first major idea – embedding clinicians in the hardest-hit firehouses – "was an utter failure." Firefighters rarely spoke to those experts, and the clinicians were overwhelmed by the scale and immediacy of the trauma.

The breakthrough came when the department stopped trying to import help from the outside and instead formalized what had long existed informally. Training firefighters to support one another created a trusted buffer between the rank-and-file and clinical care, and over time that model "became part of the fabric of the department," he said.

The International Association of Fire Fighters, a labor union, recognized how powerful that shift was and helped fund the work in New York City.

Today, Leto, who is a member of the IAFF Disaster Response To-Go Team, estimated that roughly 15,000 IAFF members have been trained in peer support – a sign that, in a culture slow to change, attitudes around mental health are beginning to shift.

But that progress has been uneven, and many departments – across fire, law enforcement, emergency medical services and 911 dispatch – are still working to build systems in which seeking support is normalized and accessible.

"Looking at mental and physical and overall well-being is not one answer with one solution," said Wooten, the former 911 dispatcher. "These are all things that have to be worked at collectively and multifaceted to make sure that we can hopefully create an opportunity to fix some of these larger systemic problems."

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Stateline is part of States Newsroom, a national nonprofit news organization focused on state policy.

FOCUS

Justin Sullivan / Getty Images / TNS

Players sort Mahjong tiles before playing a game of Mahjong at the Mahjong Lair at Dragon Well on Oct. 28 in San Francisco, California.

Mahjong is the third place of the moment for a burned-out generation

By MICHELLE MA
Bloomberg News (TNS)

On a Wednesday night at Beverly Hills' newest members-only club, Gravitas, the usual scene of dimly lit dinner tables laden with wine and caviar has been replaced by hundreds of clinking tiles. Inside, more than 50 members and guests have gathered to play an ancient game that's taken over the town: mahjong.

"The world is looking very bleak right now," says Christina Huntington, 48, after she plays – and wins – her first round. "I just wanted to do something fun."

Everyone seems to be talking about mahjong these days. The co-host of Dax Shepard's "Armchair Expert" podcast is obsessed. So are Meghan Markle and Julia Roberts. A Hallmark rom-com airing recently, called "All's Fair in Love & Mahjong," follows a small-town nurse who falls in love while teaching the game. The colorful tiles even made an appearance in Icelandic pop star Laufey's latest music video.

From London to Mumbai, mahjong events are popping up in major cities around the globe, with searches for the game up 18-fold from 2023 to 2025 and mahjong-related events growing 45-fold from 2021 to 2025, according to Eventbrite. New York's Green Tile Social Club has thrown events in partnership with buzzy brands such as Resy and A24. In April, Tinder hosted a mahjong date night at a bar in Los Angeles' Chinatown.

Mahjong is an old game, born in the mid-1800s near Shanghai. From there it quickly spread throughout China and other Asian countries, all forming their own regional variants. Its first popularity peak in the US came in the 1920s, when a Standard Oil representative named Joseph Babcock, who discovered it while stationed in Shanghai, started marketing it as an exotic game to White Americans. His countrymen embraced it so much that they eventually created their own version, today called American Mahjong, complete with a different set of tiles and rules.

"I do think we're in a moment with echoes of the 1920s," says mahjong historian Annelise Heinz, an associate professor at the University of Oregon. "There's a fascination with and a fear of China that is very obvious and present in American political and consumer culture."

At Gravitas, longtime mahjong instructor Jennie Jethwani patiently explains the rules of the game to a table of complete beginners, myself included.

Similar to rummy, mahjong involves making pairs and sets of three. Players pick up and discard tiles until they complete their hand. The game requires a set of 144 tiles, a square table and four players. Winning takes a mix of skill and luck. After each hand, players knock all the tiles into the center of the table and shuffle them around, creating a satisfying clinking. A full 16-hand game takes anywhere from two hours for a table of pros to four hours for beginners.

An old way to socialize

Finnegan Wong-Smith, 28, started going to mahjong nights at Los Angeles bar General Lee's soon after the Covid-19 pandemic, craving a social life after so many months in isolation.

"I would go by myself to meet new people," he says. "Mahjong does that well because it puts you across from someone at a table."

Soon after he joined those informal game nights, the organizers got too busy to continue hosting, so Wong-Smith took up the mantle. He gave the gatherings a name, Mahjong Underground, and worked out a regular schedule with the bar. Eventually the weekly game nights at General Lee's ballooned. Now anywhere from 200 to 250 people will show up on a Monday night to play mahjong, he says. To accommodate the throngs, Wong-Smith has brought Mahjong Underground to other bars and clubs across LA, from Santa Monica to Atwater Village.

"Finding a time or picking a thing to do – you get decision paralysis," he says. Events like Mahjong Underground offer people free, regular meetups, no RSVP required. "Having the option and not the obligation to show up lifts a lot of the burden of planning."

Attendees range from those simply seeking analog connections to second-generation kids of the Asian diaspora who saw their elders playing daily growing up, Wong-Smith says.

Jaimie Wan, 33, counts herself among that latter category. "I grew up in a family that played mahjong," Wan says. "It was always in the background, but I had no interest because I was a kid."

When Wan moved to Hong Kong in 2020, friends taught her how to play mahjong on nights out clubbing and at house parties. "I'm realizing there's so much more of my culture – centuries – that I didn't even touch on until now and I'm discovering for the first time," she says.

She got hooked and, after moving back to LA in 2024, started playing with Mahjong Underground. Recently she started her own branch of meetups, called Intergenerational Mahjong, hosted at a senior center in the predominantly Asian Monterey Park neighborhood.

Wan lost her grandmother last year, and for her the group is a way for young people – many of whom live far away from loved ones – to connect with and learn from people like their grandparents. The last gathering brought together more than 70 volunteers who spoke 10 languages, according to Wan, and participants ranged from kids to retirees.

"There's a lot of joy that comes from seeing people make connections across the table, especially people that you wouldn't expect to meet," she says. "We've kind of created a family here."

A variety of house rules

I find myself at Jethwani's mahjong event in Beverly Hills partly because, like Wan, I grew up around the game but never learned how to play. The Chinese characters on the tiles were intimidating, and so was the speed at which my aunts and uncles moved them around.

But Jethwani promised there'd be other beginners at the event and plenty of instructors to go around, as well as bilingual tiles with Roman numerals printed on them in addition to Chinese.

Jethwani, who runs a company called the Mahjong Master, teaches the game at private clubs including Gravitas and Soho House across the city, as well as to clients in their homes. She and her instructors get my table of newbies up to speed quickly, but we still fumble with the tiles, make mistakes and break subtle points of etiquette. After we make our way through one round in about an hour, she asks if we'd like to see the pros play.

The instructors gather and start "washing" the tiles. The game plays out at lightning speed, their hands throwing out and picking up tiles with practiced fluidity. Some master mahjong players don't even have to look at their tiles; they can identify them based on feel.

Like many families, mine plays with unique house rules. There are more than 40 variants of mahjong, and my relatives play a variation from Shanghai that hasn't quite fully made its way to the LA scene, which is dominated by the Hong Kong style.

For some heritage players, mahjong is a way to recover something lost. Nicole Wong, 39, author of the book Mahjong: House Rules from Across the Asian Diaspora, started documenting her family's house rules in part to preserve their history and cultural legacy. Wong's great-grandfather moved from China to New Zealand decades ago, and the way her family and other Chinese Kiwis play today is generally considered an older version of the game.

"I think of mahjong styles and histories like food recipes – retained in the diaspora more than the place they're from," Wong says. "The people in the diaspora hold tightly to identity even more than the place of origin, which has moved on."

Respecting tradition

For Wong and other children of the Asian diaspora, the new wave of interest in the game is a mixed bag. In 2021 the Mahjong Line, a company selling game sets and accessories in Dallas, faced backlash for offering mahjong sets – which typically retail for less than $100 – online for upwards of $400, some of them with tiles scrubbed of Chinese characters and references. On their website, marketing language called traditional tiles "all the same."

"Our initial goal was to design tiles that could be part of the game's evolution amongst new and younger audiences," one of the founders wrote in an email to the Today show in 2021. "It has become clear that we unintentionally re-created an experience shared by many Asian Americans of cultural erasure without using proper attribution and are working to address these issues."

To Wong the moment was upsetting because "some of us have to fight really hard to have the way we live life be recognized as legit or valid or a real thing." (Critics of the new Hallmark movie point out that a promotional poster doesn't feature any visibly Asian cast or Chinese cultural elements.) "The movie honors the heritage of Mahjong by recognizing the game's Chinese origin and its unique ability to connect cultures, generations, and communities," a Hallmark Media spokesperson said in an emailed statement.

The line between cultural appreciation and appropriation is a tricky one, which Jethwani has considered as an Indian who's found herself enmeshed in the game. She says she felt like a bit of an impostor when she started teaching mahjong. At Gravitas a copy of Wong's book sits perched on a table, and Jethwani refers to it while answering questions about the different styles of play. "Non-Indian people teach yoga. Why can't I teach mahjong as long as I am teaching it correctly and with respect to its history?" she asks.

For the University of Oregon's Heinz, who's been a historian of the game since 2008, the question isn't whether the current phase of mahjong is a fad – it's how much the style of play and physical sets themselves can change before they lose their connective tissue and become a different game entirely.

"Mahjong has always been a really powerful way to build community," she says. Because of that, it's "here to stay."

FOCUS

Photos by Meg McLaughlin / The San Diego Union-Tribune / TNS

Hannah Shaw, left, helps a volunteer give a kitten fluids May 7 as part of Kitten Nursery Training Week at the San Diego Humane Society. In partnership with Orphan Kitten Club, the program included staff from 11 national organizations to learn lifesaving techniques during peak kitten season.

Caring *for* kittens

In animal shelters, newborn cats are uniquely vulnerable – this workshop aims to change that

By MAURA FOX
The San Diego Union-Tribune (TNS)

Jackie Noble, executive director of Orphan Kitten Club, takes a closer look at a kitten during Kitten Nursery Training Week at the San Diego Humane Society.

SAN DIEGO — It was about 17 years ago that Hannah Shaw found a black kitten stuck in a tree in a Philadelphia park.

She didn't know how to care for the little cat, which had one of its eyes sealed shut with an infection – but her friend advised her not to bring it to a local animal shelter, where it could be euthanized for its young age. So she adopted it and named it Coconut, or Coco for short.

It's the classic story – a kitten rescued after getting stuck in a tree – and it could have ended there. But for Shaw, the moment set her life on a new track, one focused on helping especially young kittens that require around-the-clock specialized care.

"(Coco) was my best friend for 15 years," Shaw said. "She's the reason that I opened my eyes to this issue."

Shaw is now the founder of the Orphan Kitten Club, a San Diego-based nonprofit she started in 2016 dedicated to providing kitten resources to animal shelters around the country, including funding for staffing, kitten formula and medical treatment.

Orphan Kitten Club recently partnered with the San Diego Humane Society for a three-day workshop for 11 animal shelters to learn techniques for caring for newborn kittens up to eight weeks old, the time in a cat's life when it's most vulnerable.

In 2025, neonatal kittens – under 4 weeks old – accounted for the largest share of cat deaths in animal shelters in the U.S., at 29 percent, according to Shelter Animals Count data. Weaned kittens, from 4 to 8 weeks old, accounted for another 21 percent.

"This population has been categorized as unhealthy and untreatable," Shaw said. "So Orphan Kitten Club exists to change that."

After Shaw rescued Coco, she became her neighborhood's go-to whenever a kitten was found in need – so much that she was dubbed "the kitten lady," a name that has stuck over the years. Entirely self-taught and with a degree in psychology, she's written several books and offers educational materials on kitten care on her website.

The Orphan Kitten Club's workshop at the Humane Society this week provided participants an education on several subjects, including how to bottle-train kittens without mothers, tactics for preventing and treating diseases and how to build engagement with foster families for the kittens.

Such kittens are a challenging demographic to care for, Shaw explained. They need to be fed every two hours, and some are so dependent they can't regulate their own body temperature. They're especially susceptible to infection, and their rate of decline is faster than an adult cat if they do get sick – so keeping them in a clean environment is also important.

That can be easier said than done, especially at a shelter.

"An animal shelter is where a lot of sick animals go," Shaw said. "When a baby kitten comes in, it's kind of like bringing your newborn to a music festival."

That's why the Orphan Kitten Club aims to teach animal shelter staff how to support young kittens and give them the best chance at life.

Kitten season – when the most kittens are born – typically lasts during the warmer months from the spring through fall, but in San Diego it can be year-round thanks to the mild weather, Shaw said.

A kitten prepares to receive fluids on May 7 as part of Kitten Nursery Training Week at the San Diego Humane Society.

"It's a really interesting city for kittens," she said. "We have some of the highest need but also some of the best resources."

During Kitten Nursery Training Week, tiny kittens at the San Diego Humane Society were curled up close together, sleeping. A one-week-old kitten, her eyes still shut, snuggled up to her mom, an orange tabby named Nurse Dana that was brought in as a stray. Other larger kittens played with their toys.

The kittens can't be adopted until they're eight weeks old, so until then, they have to either stay in the nursery or be fostered by a community member.

Fostering young kittens can be a game-changer since they need regular care and it gives them the chance socialize with other cats.

Shaw encourages people to sign up to be fosters – and to call local organizations like the Feral Cat Coalition to come spay and neuter cats in the community to address the problem at its root. "There's too many coming in," she said.

She hopes the Orphan Kitten Club can expand to a point where the work isn't so needed. She says she does it less for the love of cats – she doesn't like cats any more than any other animal – than to serve as a bridge to get the kittens stable.

"It's about recognizing a vulnerable state that somebody is in," she said. "Once you get to 8 weeks, it's all smooth sailing. So it's like building this bridge to get them there. That's what it's about for me."

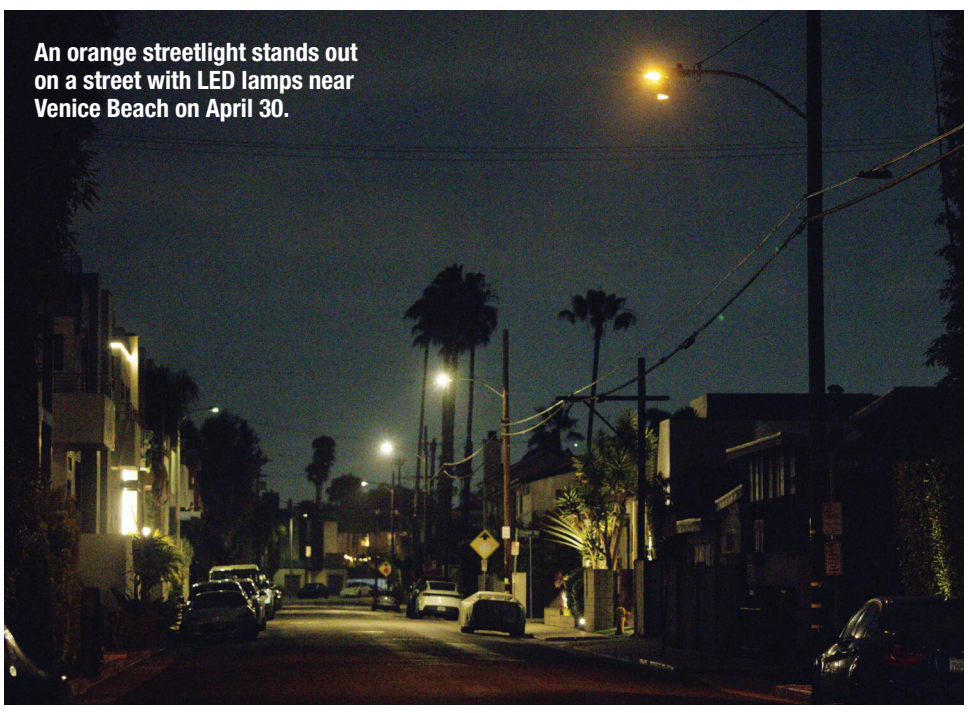
FOCUS

Los Angeles' Bureau of Street Lighting claims that brighter lights, such as these in Venice, make neighborhoods safer.

Photos by Kayla Bartkowski / Los Angeles Times / TNS

LA's golden streetlights have turned harsh white, and homeowners aren't happy

By JACK FLEMMING
Los Angeles Times (TNS)



An orange streetlight stands out on a street with LED lamps near Venice Beach on April 30.

LOS ANGELES — Light and Los Angeles are intrinsically linked.

It's a light that elicits emotion and demands reaction. Filmmaker David Lynch said L.A.'s "muted golden sunshine" was the reason filmmakers flocked here. In the New Yorker, the writer Lawrence Weschler rhapsodized about the soft glow in the air here, day and night. When watching O.J. Simpson's infamous car chase on television from across the country, Weschler burst into tears at the sight of the late afternoon sun cutting through the smog.

For decades, L.A.'s hazy blue days and golden pink dusks have given way to nights speckled with golden orange, where amber streetlights twinkle across hills, valleys and coastal plain like stars in the sky.

But now, thanks to the harsh LEDs that light much of L.A., an ever-growing number of streets feel more like prison yards when the sun goes down.

"I feel like I'm under surveillance in my own home," Linda Chen said.

Chen said her San Fernando Valley home always felt like a haven – a quiet slice of suburbia where she and her family could relax at the end of the day. But a few years ago, city workers swapped the orange sodium streetlights outside her house with cold, blue-light LEDs.

Overnight, her once warm, cozy street felt harsh and hostile. One light shined so brightly into her bedroom that she lost sleep until she installed blackout curtains.

"It's like when you're on a red-eye flight trying to get some sleep and the person next to you has their reading light on the entire time," she said. "Not the end of the world, but definitely a nuisance."

Chen is planning to downsize in a few years, but she's worried that potential buyers will be turned off by the glaring streetlights hanging over the home, and the property's resale value will take a hit.

"I guess we'll only do open houses during the day," she quipped.

L.A. was an early adopter of LED. By 2013, the Bureau of Street Lighting had swapped more than half of the city's 220,000 high-pressure sodium lamps with LED bulbs, and the department has systematically converted the rest in the years since.

Progress came with some growing pains. At the time, most LEDs on the market were bright and white, so the city went with those. Modern LEDs are warmer, and the color can be adjusted even after they're installed, but L.A. is stuck with the ones it bought before the technology developed.

The bureau does not have an exact timeline of when LEDs turned up in each neighborhood in the ongoing transformation. In the last year residents in Venice and North Hollywood were the ones to suddenly find their streets lighted up like a Walmart parking lot.

Since the bulbs are more efficient than their predecessors, the overhaul reduces annual carbon emissions by 67,000 metric tons and saves roughly $10 million in energy each year.

But lighting is an intimate affair in this city; Los Angeles has long loved its ornamental and whimsical street lamps. Ribbons of roses curl up the sides of the lights along 6th Street, Chinese dragons hang from the lamps on Olympic Boulevard, and topless women watch over Wilshire Boulevard from their cast-iron perches.

So some Angelenos are rankled by the fact that these ornate, historic lamps are spewing hospital light across the city that, in most other regards, cares about the way it looks.

Solutions for residents are few. If the city installs an LED light that shoots into your bedroom, your only recourse is to request a glare shield, an accessory fixed to the lamp that blocks the light from certain angles – but it'll cost you $350.

In letters to The Times several years ago, Joanne from Northridge missed the "mellow yellow" of the old lights. Bob from Simi Valley said that "you never know what you've got till it's gone." James from Cypress urged the city to tweak the LED bulbs to mimic the warm sodium ones.

Travis Longcore, an adjunct professor at the UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability who studies the effects of artificial night lighting on human health, said that should not be hard to achieve with LED.

"There's this take out there that all LEDs are bad, but that's not the case. You can achieve warmer colors with LEDs," Longcore said.

He said the wrong wavelengths of light can disrupt our natural processes, such as sleep, hunger and production of hormones. A bright sky is a signal that it's daytime, so getting that signal at night throws all of that out of whack. In 2020, Longcore co-published a study linking artificial night light, including blue light emitted by LEDs, to cancer.

Longcore said the issue mostly comes down to color temperature (measured in Kelvins) as opposed to brightness (measured in lumens). The older sodium lights typically had a color temperature of around 1,900 Kelvins, which our brains interpret as warm and cozy, almost like a fire. But many LED bulbs are installed with a much higher color temperature, near 4,000 Kelvins, which our brains interpret as harsh and bright, regardless of how many lumens they're actually emitting.

So if everyone hates the light blight, why do cities keep installing it?

The Bureau of Street Lighting claims that brighter lights make neighborhoods safer. Its FAQ page points to a study claiming that increased levels of lighting in New York City led to a 36 percent reduction in crimes such as murder, robbery and assault, though many lighting experts dispute that claim.

When the city first started installing LEDs in 2009, bulbs were set to 4,300 Kelvins, according to a case study. The standard has since been lowered to 3,000 Kelvins, but many fixtures installed before 2016 still operate around 4,000 Kelvins, according to Bureau of Street Lighting director Miguel Sangalang.

Sangalang said color temperature cannot be tweaked since the individual light-emitting diodes in the lamps are manufactured to a specific color temperature and can't be changed once they're made. It's the downside to being at the forefront of change.

Other cities have adopted a more conservative approach. Pasadena, for example, is slowly replacing sodium lights with LEDs, but with a Kelvin ceiling of 2,700 to 3,000.

"When L.A. first starting installing LEDs, most vendors only made bulbs with 4,000 Kelvins or even 5,000 Kelvins," said Richard Yee, an engineer with Pasadena's Department of Public Works. "Now, they have bulbs where you can easily switch the color temperature."

Yee said the city actively seeks feedback to avoid public backlash.

"Homeowners care about aesthetics," Yee said. "Whether it's businesses or residents, we typically check with folks where the lighting is going to get the thumbs-up before we install anything."

Longcore says his ideal color temperature is 1,800 Kelvins.

"Making crosswalks brighter is important to saving lives," he said. "But we don't need to light everything that way."

Across Southern California, residents are revolting against bright LEDs.

A Reddit user told The Times that her boyfriend got sick of the harsh streetlight obstructing his view of the night sky outside his home in Hemet.

One night in 2022, he sneaked outside and blasted it with orange paintballs.

"The paint didn't cover it completely but at least the glare wasn't as harsh as before," the user said.

Glendale resident Pavan Moondi said the city swapped his warm streetlights for LEDs in April 2025, and it made his evening walks less relaxing.

"It feels a little like an example of hostile architecture in the name of 'public safety' that seems to be happening everywhere," he said.

Before the lights were switched, Moondi, a filmmaker, shot a few scenes for his upcoming movie "Middle Life" in his neighborhood specifically because the glow of the amber lights matched the nostalgic vibe of the film. If shot today, the scenes would have a completely different feel.

"For indies like mine, we're at the mercy of available light," he said. "I hope politicians at the local level realize this is an easy and small way to improve the quality of life of their constituents, even if it's a subtle one. I doubt anyone prefers their neighborhood to be lit like a factory."

There's another crisis happening at the other end of the lighting spectrum. A growing number of Angelenos have no streetlights at all.

L.A.'s vast network of streetlights are connected by 27,000 miles of copper wire. Over the last decade, the price of copper has climbed 167 percent, and copper theft skyrocketed 1,200 percent, leaving thousands of streetlights dark.

Copper theft became so rampant that in 2024 the Los Angeles Police Department launched a specialized unit called the Heavy Metal Task Force to track down thieves. The force led to more than 300 arrests but was disbanded last year due to budget cuts, LAist reported.

As a result, the city has been swamped with a mounting backlog of streetlight repairs – more than 33,000. If your streetlight breaks, it'll take roughly a year for the city to fix it.

Sangalang told The Times in February that the department had only 185 people to service the city's 220,000 streetlights.

And unlike other city services, which are financed by the city's general fund, streetlighting is considered a special benefit, which means that only property owners who benefit from streetlights pay taxes for them. The tax has been unchanged since 1996 thanks to Proposition 218, which requires voter approval for increased special assessments, but the City Council recently approved a plan to send ballots to homeowners for a vote to raise the tax.

It's one of two strategies the city is taking to solve L.A.'s streetlight crisis. In March, Mayor Karen Bass announced a plan to repair and replace up to 60,000 streetlights by harnessing solar power technology, so they'd no longer be reliant on the copper wire that keeps getting stolen. The city has already installed 650 solar lights this fiscal year, Sangalang said.

The initiative will cost $65 million, drawing money and resources that aren't typically available for streetlighting. So residents and experts are viewing it as an opportunity to finally get the light they want.

"This is the ideal time to address issues of light glare, intensity and color," Longcore said.

It's worked in other places. In 2020, Longcore worked with Salt Lake City to develop a streetlighting plan that brought warmer colors and less light pollution, and he's working on a similar plan for Austin, Texas. Other communities, such as Malibu, have developed ordinances to reduce glare and artificial light, as has Joshua Tree National Park, a star-gazing haven that is designated an International Dark Sky Park.

The city's exact plan isn't clear, but Longcore said if workers are adding solar modules onto existing lamps, they could add glare shields and tune the intensity to fit the location: bright for commercial spaces and crosswalks, dimmer for residential streets. But if they're replacing entire lamps, they could also tweak the color temperature to match the warmer feel that residents are pushing for.

"We need to make light special," he said. "If it's everywhere all the time, and feels like daytime whenever you're walking around at night, then it's not special anymore."

HEALTH

Mininyx Doodle / Getty Images

How does your brain decide between the road not taken or the same old route?

Resolving conflicting memories is key to navigation

By PAULINA MAXIM
Georgia Institute of Technology
(The Conversation)

When was the last time you paid attention to your commute? And I don't mean a couple of feet in front of you, at the car merging into your lane without a blinker. I mean really paid attention to the route you take.

Did you see the landmarks in the distance that make up the city skyline? Did you drive right past the grocery store you promised to stop by at the corner of this Peachtree Street or that Peachtree Street, a struggle Atlanta locals know well?

"Oops! Force of habit," you might say to yourself as you miss your turn and begin to think about when and where you can turn around.

Relying on familiarity can either facilitate or impede daily navigation. As a researcher studying memory and navigation, I aim to understand how the brain supports spatial navigation and what happens if the cognitive mechanisms for choosing the best route home begin to decline, such as during stress or with aging.

Humans are creatures of habit – at least that's what people tell themselves when wary of trying something new. But what if a new route is faster or safer than the one you usually take? Would you try it?

Research from my team suggests that people balance between exploration and habit – that is, trying something new or sticking with the familiar – when deciding what route to take. Which navigation strategy someone chooses depends not only on their spatial abilities but on their network of brain regions that support navigation.

A spatial blueprint

Spatial navigation refers to the cognitive ability that helps you travel from one location to another. It may sound simple, but it requires using cognitive functions such as memory, attention, decision-making and assessing potential rewards – never mind the ability to simply perceive the environment itself.

THE CONVERSATION

Spatial navigation uses memories of things you consciously experienced. Two types of memory relevant to navigation are what scientists call episodic and semantic.

For example, you might retrieve an episodic memory about a specific event: remembering a detour you took a week ago to drop a package off at the post office, including the traffic and weather that day.

You might also retrieve a semantic memory that's more factual and knowledge-based: remembering how many blocks away the post office is from the park and the turns you need to make to get there.

Together, these kinds of memory inform your spatial memory, which allows you to retrieve location information. This could be where buildings are in relation to each other or where objects are situated in your house. Spatial memories help form your cognitive map, which is essential for getting around in the world.

Often, these different ways of remembering interact, and you can use one type of memory to inform the other. For example, you've become accustomed to your commute to work and know it's relatively short (semantic memory), but over the past three days you've been arriving late due to heavy traffic (episodic memory), so you choose to take a different route next time.

Research from my team has found that disagreements in your brain over possible routes can happen. Different types of memory can come up with different solutions for what route you can take, and this conflict is a big factor in how hard your brain needs to work when navigating an environment.

Responding to new and familiar memories

Habits stem from what researchers call stimulus-response memories. These include the knee-jerk reaction you might have to familiar landmarks – when you perceive these places, your brain signals you to make a turn along your commute without needing to consciously think about it.

Habits are rigid, but they can also be beneficial: By taking care of the navigation for you, habit frees up your brain to have a conversation with someone or plan what to make for dinner when you get home.

When navigating less familiar routes or environments, where habit doesn't kick in automatically, you rely on brain regions such as the hippocampus to call on detailed memories from recent experiences to help guide the way.

But let's say you're shopping at a new grocery store where most things are where you expect them to be, even though you've never been in this particular store before. What happens when your brain experiences both something new and something familiar about an environment?

Researchers have shown that when something about an environment is familiar and aligns with your prior experiences, the prefrontal regions of your brain – those responsible for executive functions such as decision-making – become more active. They can bypass or even inhibit your hippocampus's ability to form new memories about specific events. In other words, your brain can weave information about a new experience into your database of existing knowledge, rather than storing it as completely new information with little relation to the past. This process may help fast-track your understanding about new experiences.

Updating cognitive maps

Researchers know that cognitive maps of the environment depend on the hippocampus and its database of memories about specific events. However, I and other researchers argue these maps can also function as a schema – a collection of memories made up of associations between environmental details. You can add new information to these collections and use it to infer new relationships.

Say a new pedestrian bridge is built between the park and the post office. Your brain can more easily weave this new route information into your existing memories compared with learning a new environment from scratch. Similarly, if you just moved to a new town and know very little about the spatial layout, you might rely on your past experiences of towns to infer where something is.

Using neuroimaging techniques as well as virtual reality programs designed to test a participant's ability to navigate different routes, my team found that there is likely an interdependent relationship between the brain areas that store memories of specific events and areas that store related information across memories when planning to navigate less familiar places.

New routes are more difficult to follow when they differ from your prior experiences. Thus, a stronger schema helps integrate your knowledge of the spatial relationships between locations and landmarks (such as the distance between the post office and the park) with more general knowledge (such as prior route difficulty). This all informs how you choose to navigate.

Navigating daily life

These memory principles help explain why inconsistencies with your previous experiences can make it so difficult to navigate many aspects of daily life.

Imagine you woke up tomorrow and the GPS on your smartphone was no longer available. How will you plan your route to get to your destination?

You might be used to navigating north from your home to the grocery store – but have you ever tried to navigate to that grocery story from a different location? It's much harder!

Factors such as stress, aging and general cognitive decline can affect brain function and human behavior. Imagine how much harder that new route to the grocery store is for an older adult.

Relating new information to your prior experiences may help strengthen your schema and make navigation easier. And understanding what processes the brain needs to go through to solve these navigation problems can help you understand why getting around can be challenging.

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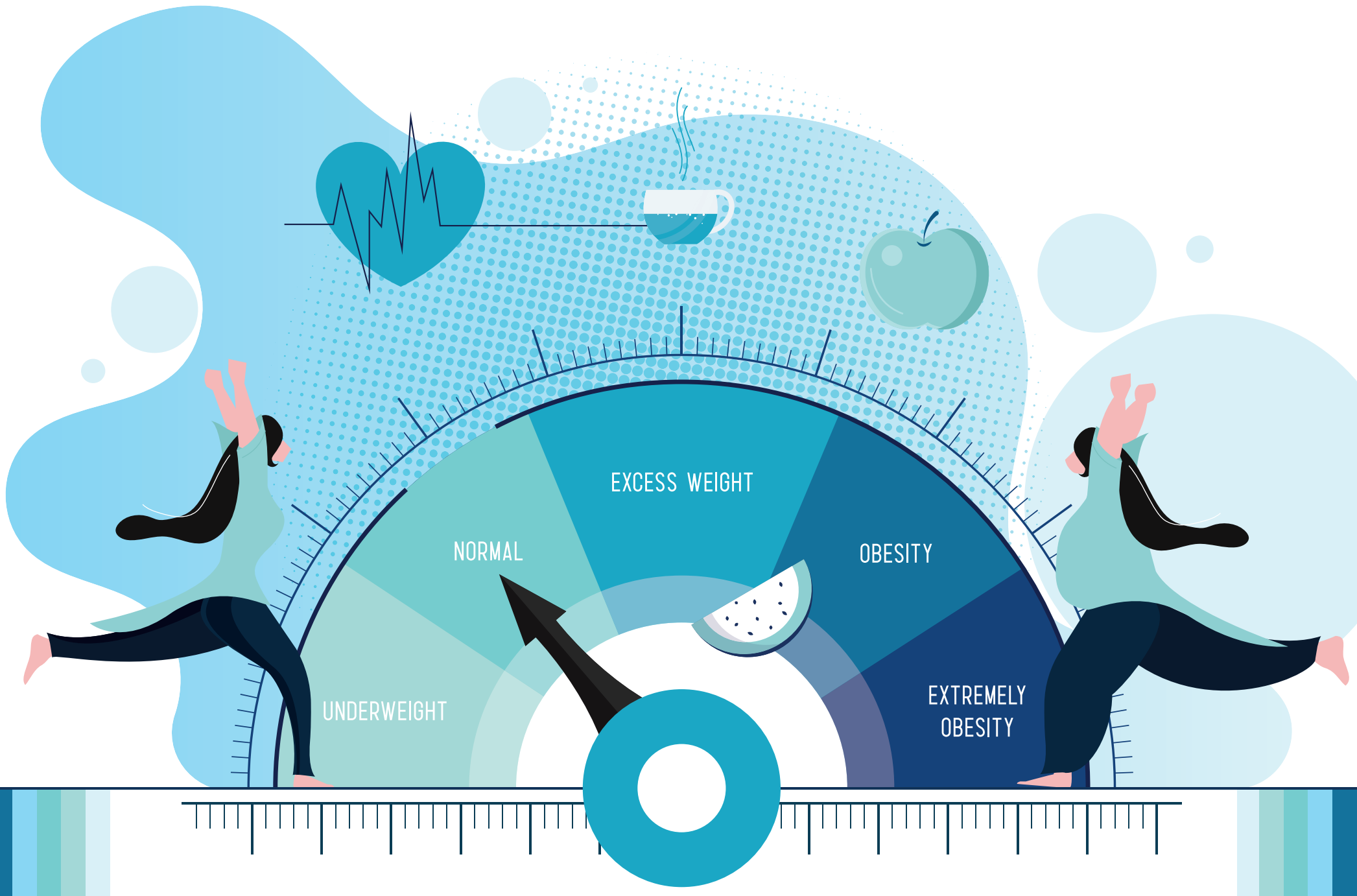

You know exercise is good for you, so why is it so hard to put into practice?

By LAURA BAEHR
Drexel University (The Conversation)

Physical activity is one of the most powerful health tools people have to improve mood, energy and sleep, even after just a few sessions.

But the real superpower of an active lifestyle is what it can do for health and quality of life over time. Scientific evidence repeatedly demonstrates that physical activity reduces the risk of developing chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and even some cancers. Despite this, most Americans are not getting enough physical activity in their daily lives.

So why are so few people physically active when the benefits are widely known?

As a physical therapist and rehabilitation scientist who studies how to boost movement for people living with chronic conditions and physical disabilities, I spend a lot of time thinking about that question.

The short answer is that understanding the importance of exercise usually doesn't translate into exercising. Making it a part of your lifestyle requires believing you can do it and knowing you can do it.

Exercise is a lifestyle choice that helps reduce the likelihood of developing a chronic illness. But the good news is that if you're one of the 194 million Americans already living with one or more chronic illnesses, beginning or maintaining an exercise routine can slow the progression, reduce symptoms and improve health outcomes.

An array of health benefits

The list of benefits from movement is long. Here are just a few examples:

- Physical activity improves the heart's efficiency to move blood to the lungs and circulate it throughout the entire body.
- Engaging in physical activity protects against cognitive decline over time.
- Becoming more active contributes to improved insulin resistance, which protects against diabetes risk and helps manage diabetes symptoms.
- An active lifestyle can reduce cancer risk and improve outcomes for various cancer types, including breast, colorectal and prostate cancer.

Guidelines for getting and staying active

While some movement is better than none, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer research-based guidelines for the type and frequency of activities to engage in weekly for long-term health benefits.

The CDC encourages all adults, including those with chronic health conditions or disabilities, to aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity, such as walking, jogging or swimming. Adults should also do muscle-strengthening activities two or more days per week, which could include weightlifting and body weight exercises.

Older adults should add balance activities, such as tai chi or yoga, to help prevent falls by challenging the body's balance systems.

If you're not achieving these recommended weekly physical activity guidelines, you're not alone. Only half of Americans hit the aerobic target, and just 1 in 4 meet the full CDC guidelines.

This gap represents a health crisis that, if addressed, could save lives. A 2024 large-scale review showed that people who engage in regular physical activity in adulthood may reduce the risk of early death by 30 percent to 40 percent from all causes, most specifically from cardiovascular disease and cancer.

The study also showed that beginning exercise at any time in adulthood can improve survival benefits.

The difference between knowing and doing

People are perpetually being sold on the benefits of physical activity, whether it's from national healthcare organizations, their medical teams or social media influencers.

But research is clear that education alone does not predict changes in behavior.

Instead, shifting your beliefs about the barriers preventing you from exercise might actually be the key to get you moving more.

In 1977, a psychologist named Albert Bandura proposed that the ability to perform a task even when it's difficult – a concept called self-efficacy – is the most important personal characteristic that drives healthy changes in behavior.

Half a century later, self-efficacy is still considered one of the most crucial personal factors for behavioral change when it comes to long-term physical activity. Researchers who develop and test exercise interventions, including me, evaluate novel tools and programs that are built to boost self-efficacy.

Someone with high self-efficacy might say that they can get back to their exercise routine even if they miss a day. Or they might find a way to still exercise when they're busy or tired. Someone with lower self-efficacy might be thrown off their routine if presented with the same obstacles.

But how do you build this crucial trait and get moving more? A meta-analysis found that despite its importance, there is not one magic way to boost self-efficacy.

That's because people's behavior is more complicated than individual factors alone. People and groups have varying needs and contexts that require tailored approaches.

Tips to increase exercise self-efficacy

Self-efficacy may be affected by multiple factors, but people can still apply techniques to boost their ability to start and stay with an exercise routine.

Make it manageable. It may seem intuitive to set personal goals, but many of us aim too high and end up discouraged. Goals focused on weight loss, heart health or muscle strength are fine, but they can take a long time to achieve. Long-range goals don't tend to be motivating in the difficult moments – like when you want to hit snooze but promised yourself that you were going to take a long walk before work.

Instead, try short-term goal-setting – such as aiming to get a set number of lunchtime walks in during the workweek. This will move you toward your long-term goals, while making it easier to see and feel progress.

In 2026, the American College of Sports Medicine refreshed its guidance on strength training, which represents synthesized findings from 137 systematic reviews and the first update since 2009. The biggest recommendation difference? Consistency matters more than specificity of strength programs. What that means is that doing any strength training has health benefits as long as it is the kind you will keep doing.

Make it add up. The CDC's recommended 150 minutes of aerobic activity is meant to be spread throughout the week – not done all at once. Research shows that small bursts of activity still have significant impacts on your overall health, and you're much more likely to stick with them.

Only have 15 minutes while your kid is asleep? Have a short exercise video or app cued up for nap time. Waiting for your next Zoom meeting to start? Climb your stairs once or twice. Microwaving your lunch? Hold on to the counter and lift and lower your heels until the timer goes off. Every little bit matters to your mind and body.

Make it meaningful. Prioritize doing things you enjoy. The gym is not for everyone, and luckily this style of structured exercise is just one of many options for physical activity. Go bird-watching, join a gardening group, binge watch your favorite show on the treadmill. Any activity you do that uses energy is like dropping a coin into your weekly physical activity bank.

Make it more fun. Choose to be around people who are already exercising – and who encourage you to do it, too. Research shows that people who are sedentary will increase their physical activity by socializing with someone who is active.

Another study shows that older adults can tap into the energy of their peers during group exercise, helping to build self-efficacy. Exercising with others can even reduce social isolation and loneliness. As a bonus, choosing physical activities you enjoy can improve your mood and boost your confidence.

Overcoming the hurdles

These strategies come with a very important caveat: Increasing self-efficacy is empowering, but context also matters.

Some structural barriers to physical activity are beyond the scope of our individual motivation. Researchers and health professionals know that lower socioeconomic status, decreased neighborhood safety and lack of access to exercise programs make being and staying active even more difficult.

But the thing to remember is that even small improvements can have big impacts. It is consistent practice – not perfection – that is key to reaping all the benefits physical activity has to offer.

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Immigrants choose doctors with a shared cultural background

What they are seeking isn't sameness but connection

By YASAMINE SALKAR
Georgia State University
(The Conversation)

At a recent dental appointment, I was unexpectedly seen by a new provider in my longtime dentist's practice. Early in the visit, he realized we were both Iranian American. Like me, he had been born and raised in the United States. We were both fluent English speakers and fully accustomed to navigating American medical settings.

After we briefly discussed how the war in Iran was affecting our families there, something shifted. The exchange was short, but deeply human. I left feeling an immediate sense of connection, trust and familiarity with a provider I had only just met.

That experience helped me better understand something I had long observed among immigrant families – that immigrant patients often seek out healthcare providers from similar backgrounds. What they are often seeking goes beyond a shared language or cultural familiarity.

I am a health administration professor and lawyer who studies how people navigate health systems. In my work, and through conversations with immigrant families, including my own, I have seen how subtle interactions in clinical settings can shape whether patients feel confident or dismissed and unsure about returning for care. For some, choosing a doctor with a similar background represents their best attempt to feel more understood.

The fact that many patients actively seek out providers who share aspects of their cultural background, even when doing so may require additional effort or limit their options, illustrates that it is not a minor preference, but a meaningful part of how people experience care.

Beyond a shared language

Immigrants make up a growing share of patients in the U.S., accounting for about 15 percent of the population.

Large national studies suggest that patients often seek providers with whom they share a cultural background. That choice is especially pronounced among racial and ethnic minority patients, those who speak a language other than English at home and those with public insurance.

Even as the U.S. physician workforce becomes more diverse, many patients still report difficulty finding providers who share their cultural or linguistic background. At the same time, some evidence suggests the number of foreign-born physicians may also be declining. In my view, that makes the effort to find such providers all the more noteworthy.

A shared language may seem like the most obvious explanation for why immigrants seek out doctors from similar backgrounds. And in many cases, it does matter. When patients and clinicians speak the same language, communication improves and medical errors decline, especially for patients who are not fluent in English.

But language alone does not explain experiences like my own.

Narrative research on immigrant patients describes broader issues. For example, a patient might raise a concern about a persistent symptom, only to feel too quickly dismissed, or hear an explanation delivered in a simplified way that does not match their level of knowledge or experience.

These moments can be subtle, but as they accumulate over time, they may contribute to a sense that medical care feels transactional or dismissive rather than responsive to patients' concerns. Even patients who are fully fluent in English and comfortable navigating the health system may come to expect not to be fully heard.

That expectation can shape where people feel comfortable seeking care.

Why shared background can matter

Sharing a background, whether through race, ethnicity, language or cultural experience, can sometimes help create a sense of connection – especially at the start of a relationship.

But research suggests the relationship is more nuanced than simply matching patients and doctors by identity. The way a doctor communicates, as well as whether they listen carefully, take concerns seriously and involve patients in decisions, also plays a central role.

In one study that examined physician-patient relationships across racial and ethnic groups, patients who felt personally similar to their physician – for example, in how the physician communicated, approached decisions or seemed to understand their concerns – were more likely to trust their doctor, feel satisfied with their care and follow medical advice.

Research on patient-centered care has similarly found that patients value interactions where they feel respected, understood and able to communicate openly.

Together, these studies suggest that while shared backgrounds can sometimes help create trust, communication and interpersonal connection may matter just as much.

More research is needed to understand how much these experiences reflect differences in communication itself versus connection spurred by a common background. But for immigrant patients, it may not be the shared identity itself that matters most, but the expectation that it will help them feel more easily understood. When patients consistently struggle to find that experience, shared background can become one of its few visible signals.

Understanding why immigrant patients make these choices ultimately reveals something more universal: Trust in medicine is shaped not only by clinical expertise, but by everyday human interaction. And patients value this quality so highly that they actively seek out providers who they believe will offer that sense of understanding and connection.

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ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

Poison prevention and treatment tips for parents

By ALISON TOTHY, M.D., FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics
(TNS)

Each year, approximately 3 million people, many under age 5, swallow or come into contact with a poisonous substance. Most poisonings occur at home where even simple household products can be dangerous. These include over-the-counter and prescription medicines, cleaning products, liquid nicotine, antifreeze, windshield wiper fluid, pesticides, furniture polish, gasoline, kerosene and lamp oil. Here are some important ways to help keep children safe.

It is very important to store all medicine, cleaning and laundry products (including detergent packets), paints/varnishes and pesticides in their original packaging in locked cabinets or containers, and out of sight and reach of children. Some items, such as individually packaged laundry and dish detergent, look tempting for small children so consider using traditional liquid or powder laundry detergents instead until all children who live in or visit your home are at least 6 years old.

Safety latches are a great tool to keep curious children out of cabinets where you store chemicals. They automatically lock when you close a cabinet door and can help keep children away from dangerous products. No matter what, the safest place to store poisonous products is somewhere a child can't see or reach.

Remember to keep medications in their original containers and discard once used. Medicine bottles with safety caps are designed to be child-resistant but are not fully childproof, so you still need to keep medications out of the reach of children.

With the rise of e-cigarettes and vaping devices, children are more frequently exposed to their toxic components. If you use an e-cigarette or vape, keep the liquid nicotine refills locked up out of your children's reach and only buy refills that use child-resistant packaging. A small amount of liquid nicotine spilled on the skin or swallowed can be fatal to a child.

Cannabinoids, especially in the form of edibles, are especially dangerous to children. They often look like familiar candy and chocolate bars that tempt kids. Use a special storage bag with a lock or another item to lock up these items.

Items in your home that can cause poisoning extend beyond medications and cleaning materials. Keep natural gas-powered appliances, furnaces, and coal, wood or kerosene stoves in safe working order. Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors can prevent possible poisoning from natural gas or other fuels.

Even new toys and gadgets like greeting cards and musical children's books given as gifts may contain button batteries or small pieces that can cause injury if ingested. Be especially vigilant when there is a change in routine. Holidays, visits to and from grandparents' homes, and other special events may bring greater risk of poisoning if the usual safeguards are defeated or not in place.

If your child is unconscious, not breathing, or having convulsions or seizures due to poison contact or ingestion, call 911 or your local emergency number immediately. To get help from Poison Control, use their online tool or call 1-800-222-1222. Both options are free, expert and confidential.

Different types and methods of poisoning require different, immediate treatment. If the child swallowed the poison, take the item away from the child, and have the child spit out any remaining substance. Do not make your child vomit and do not use ipecac syrup unless directed by a medical professional.

If your child has swallowed a button-cell battery or a battery is lodged in his or her nose, ear or throat, seek treatment in a hospital emergency department immediately. Serious tissue damage can occur in as little as 2 hours.

If their skin or eye come in contact with the poison, remove your child's clothes and rinse the skin with lukewarm water for at least 15 minutes. Flush your child's eye by holding the eyelid open and pouring a steady stream of room temperature water into the inner corner for 15 minutes.

If you believe they could have been impacted by poisonous fumes, take your child outside or into fresh air immediately. If your child has stopped breathing, call 911, start cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and do not stop until the child breathes on his or her own, or until someone can take over.

If you are concerned about specific cleaning products, talk with your pediatrician. Your regional Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) have staff who can also talk with parents about concerns over environmental toxins.

MAYO CLINIC Q&A

Questions to ask before joint replacement surgery

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK
(TNS)

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: I need to have a joint replacement, but I'm really nervous. What questions should I ask my orthopedic doctor?

ANSWER: Knee and hip replacements have changed so much due to advanced surgical techniques, making them far different from those even five years ago. From multiple-day hospital stays, total joint replacement has advanced to a one-night stay or even going home the same day as surgery.

Questions from my patients usually fall into three categories:

- How do I know it's time for surgery?
- What will happen during surgery?
- What will recovery be like?

Let's start with the "when" question. Patients undergoing replacement surgery have arthritis in the joint. Arthritis is the loss of the protective cartilage layer between bones, and when that cushioning is gone, you have bone-on-bone contact, pain and swelling. Physical therapy, over-the-counter medications and injections can help for a while.

Eventually, the pain and discomfort affect your mobility and activities of daily living, whether it's walking the dog or playing with grandkids. That's when you may decide it's time.

But joint replacements aren't only for older patients. Total joint replacement in people in their 50s is no longer uncommon.

Deciding on surgery

Once you've decided on surgery, the next step is preparation, particularly making sure any chronic conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure are under control. To reduce your risk of infection, stop any steroid injections at least three months before surgery. You'll also need to address dental work, such as cleanings.

Your orthopedic care team will provide you – through classes and guides – with a wealth of information on how to prepare, including:

- Required preoperative tests and exams.
- Adapting your home for recovery.
- Arranging for care when you return home, such as having a support person with you through the early weeks.
- Setting up transportation to and from physical therapy and medical appointments.
- Requesting a temporary accessible parking permit.

If you have questions or concerns, be sure to ask your care team so that you feel ready for surgery and recovery. Your surgeon also will be preparing. This includes using X-rays or CT scans to study your bones and anatomy.

If your surgeon is using robotics, they're able to make a 3-D model of the joint to assist with planning your joint replacement. In knees, this lets them correct issues caused by arthritis, such as bow-leggedness or knock knees. During your surgery, the surgeon will map your knee in the operating room to the 3-D model on the computer built from your preoperative CT scan. Your surgeon will use the robot to collect information on ligament balance and alignment so they can determine the best position to place your implants.

While robotics makes total joint replacement more accurate, it doesn't make it less invasive. It helps achieve a more precise balance, which can lead to less pain and wear and tear on the implant.

When it comes to hip replacement, there are multiple surgical approaches available. The two most common approaches are the posterior and the direct anterior. The direct anterior approach is a more recent surgical technique that has gained popularity over the last decade. The anterior approach is considered "muscle-sparing" because the surgeon is working between the muscles. As a result, patients tend to recover faster, and there's less risk of dislocation.

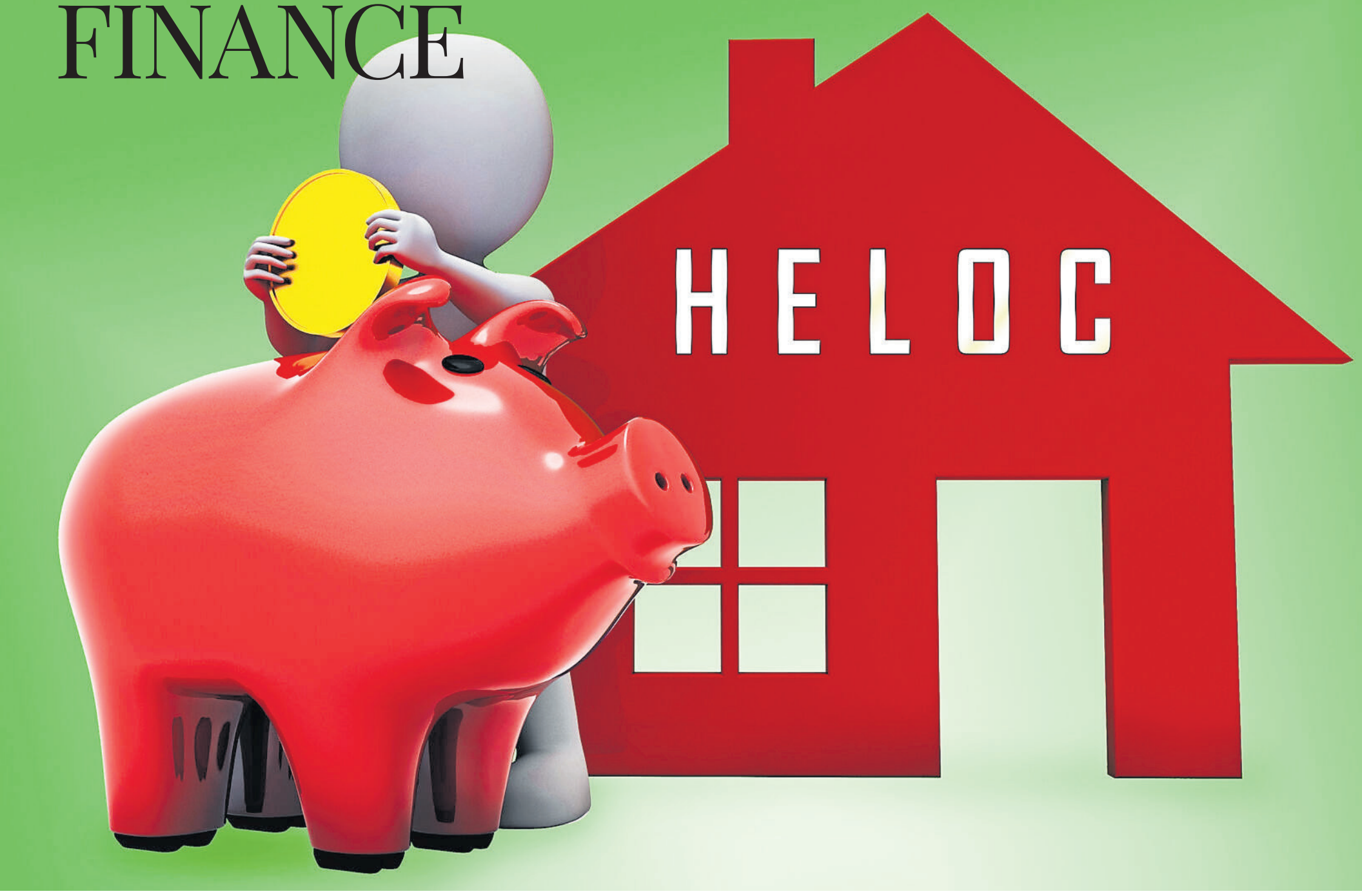
For both knee and hip replacements, don't hesitate to talk with your surgeon about the techniques they'll be using.

After surgery

After surgery, knee and hip recovery differ:

- Knees. For the first two weeks, there's pain and swelling, but also the need to regain range of motion to minimize stiffness and scar tissue. Therapy is a big focus of early recovery. At-home physical therapy is every day; in-person is typically twice a week.
- Hips. The first few weeks are for letting the incision heal and reducing pain and swelling. That means gradually increasing activity, using a walker, then a cane. Most patients do home-based therapy but not in-person therapy.

Whether you've had a knee or hip joint replacement, you're able to return to your regular activities within three months. However, there may be some restrictions. For the hips, these may include avoiding extreme positions, such as deep squatting and certain yoga poses, to decrease dislocation risk. For knees, kneeling may be uncomfortable and often isn't recommended.



Stuart Miles / Dreamstime / TNS

A HELOC is a way to tap into your home's equity – the portion of your home you own outright. Like a credit card, a HELOC lets you borrow from a credit line gradually, as the need arises, up to a specified dollar limit. You can then pay the money back in installments.

How to shop for a HELOC

10 ways to get the best HELOC rate

By LINDA BELL
Bankrate.com (TNS)

If you're considering borrowing against your home with a home equity line of credit (HELOC), shopping around for one beforehand is crucial – both for the most competitive interest rate and for other favorable terms and conditions, too.

HELOCs come with several expenses and conditions that impact the cost of the loan over its lifetime: prepayment penalties, the length of the draw period, minimum draw amounts, interest-only payments, and annual and "lock-in rate" fees. You'll likely need a strong credit score as well, but lenders will also consider your debt-to-income ratio and your overall financial profile.

Here we'll explore how to shop for a HELOC and provide 10 tips to get you started.

What is a HELOC?

A HELOC is a way to tap into your home's equity – the portion of your home you own outright. Like a credit card, a HELOC lets you borrow from a credit line gradually, as the need arises, up to a specified dollar limit. You can then pay the money back in installments.

10 tips to get the best HELOC rate

1. Maintain good credit

TAKEAWAY: Having a higher credit score will help you get lower rates, so do what you can to raise yours before you apply.

Having a good credit score is one of the key ways to obtain a competitive interest rate when applying for a HELOC. It's the main thing the lender will consider when deciding how much to charge you.

A credit score of 700 or above will most likely qualify you for the best interest rates, though homeowners with scores as low as 620 might still get approved.

"It's all part of the riskiness factor for the lender, if they're gonna lend to you or not," says Sacha Rady, Realtor and real estate advisor at Compass in Atlanta. "They want to make sure they get paid back. The lower the credit score, the higher the interest rate you're going to have." Your credit score will also determine which loan products you might qualify for.

To help improve your credit score when applying for a HELOC, consider these steps:

- Check your credit report and dispute any errors
- Keep your credit card balances low
- Make all credit payments on time
- Hold off on acquiring new debts or credit cards shortly before you apply (your score declines when you open an account)

2. Calculate your equity

TAKEAWAY: You'll likely find lower HELOC rates if you have substantial equity built up in your home.

The amount of equity (outright ownership stake) you have in your home determines the size of your home equity line of credit, and it influences the HELOC rate you're able to get. The more equity you have, the better you look to a lender and the less likely that you're overloaded with debt against your home.

Having a decent amount of equity also means that you'll have a lower combined loan-to-value ratio, or CLTV. The CLTV is determined by adding up your current loan balance and your desired line of credit and then dividing by the appraised value of your home. For HELOCs, lenders typically prefer CLTVs below 85 percent. Plus, a lower CLTV often translates to a lower interest rate.

To get an idea of how much home equity you have, find an online estimate of the value of your home and subtract the balance owed on your mortgage. Here's an example:

- $325,000 (home value) – $215,000 = $110,000 (amount of equity in dollars)
- $110,000 / $325,000 (home value) = 0.338 (33.8 percent equity)

3. Consider different types of lenders

TAKEAWAY: Your own bank or credit union is a great place to start looking for a HELOC, but it's always best to compare rates from at least a few other lenders to make sure you're getting the most competitive terms.

While your current lender may offer you a good deal on a HELOC, don't stop there. Compare estimates from other players, including:

- National banks
- Smaller community banks
- Credit unions
- Online lenders

Each type of lender has its own advantages. For instance, online lenders generally have lower operating costs, which can allow them to offer you lower interest rates, while local banks and credit unions may have a better understanding of your local market and offer you more personalized service or fewer fees – especially if you already do business at that institution.

To get the best HELOC rate, try to get at least three quotes when considering your options.

4. Understand introductory rates

TAKEAWAY: Know how and when your HELOC interest rate might change during the draw and repayment periods.

When you think you've found a great HELOC rate, find out how long it will last and how it might change over time. A HELOC typically comes with an adjustable rate during the draw period that fluctuates in sync with the prime rate or other benchmark index. However, some lenders may offer you a fixed rate for an initial, temporary period, sometimes called a teaser rate.

"Some lenders offer very attractive introductory rates for the first six to 12 months only to increase it meaningfully after that period," says Vikram Gupta, head of home lending strategic partnerships at Wells Fargo.

Find out how long your introductory rate will last and what your rate will be after that period ends – especially if you're planning to withdraw funds over several years. A lower rate during a year-long introductory period may not be worth it if your rate skyrockets after.

5. Look for rate caps

TAKEAWAY: A low rate cap protects you against a market of rising interest rates.

The interest rates on HELOCs are based on a benchmark rate or index, like the prime rate, plus an additional percentage, or margin, your lender puts on. They are usually variable, fluctuating with their benchmark.

However, there is a limit: Most HELOCs offer rate caps as a safeguard against rising interest rates. If you select a HELOC with a low rate cap, you're protected from paying more than that maximum, even if the prime rate spikes. If there is no cap, you run the risk of your interest rate pushing your monthly payment beyond what you can afford.

6. Factor in fees

TAKEAWAY: When comparing lenders, be sure to consider any relevant fees, as well as the interest rate, in order to get a true picture of the total cost of the loan. Even with fees, some loans may still end up having a lower overall cost.

While obtaining a low interest rate is important, the fees associated with a HELOC also play a big factor in your final cost.

Typical fees include:

- Origination fee: An amount that the lender charges for processing and approving your HELOC application.
- Third-party fee: A fee charged by an outside servicer for work done pertaining to your loan, like an appraiser, legal counsel or individuals doing a title search.
- Annual fee: A yearly expense charged by your lender to keep your account open for the duration of the loan.
- Inactivity fee: A fee levied by the lender if you do not draw on the account for a specified (by the lender) period.
- Early closure fee/prepayment penalty: Expense charged if you pay off your HELOC early and close your account–usually within the first few years.
- Lock-in fee: This is a fee to fix the interest rate on all or part of your HELOC balance (more on this in tip number nine) during the draw period.

Get documentation for each quote you receive, including the associated interest and all rate fees so you can compare your options side by side. It's important to evaluate the total, long-term cost of each loan offer. And don't be afraid to negotiate.

7. Watch out for balloon payments

TAKEAWAY: A low rate may not be worth it if the trade-off is a huge balloon payment at the end of your term.

Getting a low monthly rate may seem like the most important factor when choosing a HELOC, but sometimes those low rates come at the expense of a balloon payment. A balloon payment requires you to pay off your remaining balance in a lump sum at the end of your term – a potentially huge payment if you're not prepared for it.

If you are unable to make the balloon payment for some reason, you may be forced to refinance the loan or even sell your property entirely in order to cover the payment. The good news is that HELOCs with end-of-term balloon payments are less common in today's market, but think twice before agreeing to these terms.

8. Choose shorter draw and repayment periods

TAKEAWAY: Shorter draw periods and repayment periods pose less risk to the lender, so you may be offered lower interest rates if you have the option to choose shorter terms.

Many lenders have only one set of HELOC terms, but some lenders may let you choose the length of your draw period and the repayment period. Opting for a shorter repayment term can decrease the amount of interest you pay.

In addition, you may score a better interest rate if you select a shorter repayment timeline. Check with different lenders to see if changing the length of the draw or repayment periods is a possibility.

9. Look for fixed-rate options

TAKEAWAY: If interest rates are low, fixed-rate options during the draw period could be a selling point. Even if the lock comes with a fee, it may be worth it to avoid future rising rates.

More and more lenders are offering the option to convert some or all of your HELOC balance into a fixed-rate loan for a set period of time, sometimes without a fee. This is a good option if you want to lock in the interest rate without worrying about potential fluctuations in the market. Doing so may allow you to pay less out-of-pocket during the loan's lifetime, too.

If you feel interest rates are going to rise before you have the ability to pay off the HELOC, then obtaining a fixed rate can provide some comfort and security. However, a longer period with a fixed interest rate could mean a higher interest rate. And the strategy could backfire if interest rates start dramatically declining.

10. Take advantage of discounts

TAKEAWAY: Autopay or member discounts are possible ways to lower the APR on your HELOC, so look for ways to save wherever you can.

If you have an existing relationship with a bank or credit union, you may qualify for member discounts on your HELOC rate. Many lenders also offer rate discounts for setting up automatic payments.

"Some lenders offer what I call bundled pricing," says Jean Chalifoux Kiely, executive vice president and director of consumer banking at Sunrise Banks, based in St. Paul, Minn. "The deeper the relationship, the deeper the discount."

You should still talk to multiple lenders, though, as the best deal isn't always with a bank you already have a relationship with.

Bottom line on getting the best HELOC rate

A HELOC can be a useful way to cover large or unexpected expenses. In many cases, HELOCs are a better bet than credit cards, personal loans and even home equity loans. But in the current economic environment, it's more important than ever to do your due diligence before choosing a lender.

As you investigate, remember that there are steps you can take to reduce the amount of interest you pay over the life of the loan.

Frequently asked questions

- How fast can you get funding from a HELOC? HELOC funds are generally available four business days after the closing (there's a mandatory three-day waiting period, to give the borrower time to cancel). Getting approved for a HELOC, however, can take up to a month – the application process is similar to that of a mortgage. Even so, some lenders, especially online ones, promise decisions and funding in as little as three or five days.
- Is it hard to get a HELOC right now? The denial rate on HELOC applications in the second quarter of 2025 was 38.29 percent, according to the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act. In other words, over a third of HELOC applicants were turned down. But back in 2020, the rate reached as high as 60 percent, suggesting it's significantly easier to get a credit line nowadays.

FOOD

The tale of two cookbooks

ONE EMBRACES VEGETABLES, THE OTHER HIDES THEM

By NICOLE HVIDSTEN
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

As a kid in small-town Minnesota, I didn't appreciate the bounty of my dad's sprawling garden. I turned my nose up at parsnips, rutabagas and eggplant, and tolerated green peppers and green beans. I did welcome squash, tomatoes, carrots and zucchini though, so all was not lost on me.

Now, there's not a vegetable I don't embrace, or at least tolerate (I'm looking at you, celery). My spouse, on the other hand, is the opposite. While he does eat select vegetables, we don't share the same adventurous spirit, at least on culinary matters.

Two new cookbooks – "Centerpiece" by Helen Graham and Heidi Herman's "The Hidden Vegetables Cookbook" – perfectly capture our relationships with vegetables. One touts recipes for "veggie-averse adults," the other advocates "bold, vibrant recipes to put vegetables in the spotlight." Both urge cooks to work vegetables into meals, they just go about it very differently.

Graham, who was the executive chef at the London vegetarian restaurant Bubala, takes a playful approach to recipes, and you'll find big flavors from the Middle East and North Africa, as well as some inspired by her upbringing and Ashkenazi Jewish heritage.

There are spirited sauces and salads, mains and desserts, all elevating vegetables to superstar status. You'll roast watermelon and pickle eggplant, throw zucchini on skewers and marry carrots and cardamon in a sweet halwa. In honor of spring and picnic season, we're sharing recipes for Potato Salad and Basil Zhoug with Coconut Crunch, and Flash-fried Snow Peas with Hazelnuts and Polenta.

Two new cookbooks are for those on opposite ends of the vegetable-eating spectrum.

On the other end of the spectrum, Herman's "Hidden Vegetables" works to creatively infuse vegetables into dishes with broad appeal.

The idea, she puts simply, is to get the nutritional value of vegetables without having to taste them. Beet juice finds its way into bright-pink glazed doughnuts, Brussels sprouts and pureed spinach are mixed into a batch of baked beans and riced carrots and broccoli appear in barbecue meatballs. The book is colorful and easy to follow, with loads of tips on shopping for and preparing vegetables, pairing seasonings, and the pros and cons of fresh vs. frozen to help guide cooks. To show the gamut of recipes in the book, we're including Herman's recipes for Banana Cauliflower Muffins, Veggie Peanut Chicken and Zucchini Noodles, and Cauliflower au Gratin Pasta.

Like them or not, eating your vegetables has never been easier.

For the veggie lovers

Potato Salad and Basil Zhoug with Coconut Crunch
Serves 6

There are a few components here; save yourself the stress and make them all ahead of time and assemble the salad the day of serving. The coconut crunch recipe produces more than you will need; you'll want to keep it on hand for making simple salads or roasted vegetables taste immeasurably better. It will keep for a month in a cool, dark place. From "Centerpiece" by Helen Graham (Hamlyn, 2026).

2 3/4 lb. Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-in. cubes
1 tsp. fine sea salt
1 recipe Basil Zhoug (see below)
1/2 red onion, finely chopped
FOR THE GARLIC AND LEMON DRESSING:
2 1/2 tbsp. lemon juice
3 1/2 tbsp. mayonnaise
7 tbsp. Greek yogurt
3 cloves garlic, finely grated
1 tsp. fine sea salt
FOR THE COCONUT CRUNCH:
6 tbsp. pumpkin seeds, toasted and roughly chopped
6 tbsp. unsweetened coconut
2 tbsp. toasted sesame oil
2 tbsp. maple syrup or agave syrup
2 tsp. red pepper flakes
1 tsp. fine sea salt

Put the potatoes in a pan with the 1 teaspoon of fine sea salt, then pour in enough cold water to cover by 1 inch. Bring to a boil, then cook for 12 to 15 minutes until tender throughout. Drain and allow to steam-dry for 10 minutes in a colander set over a bowl.

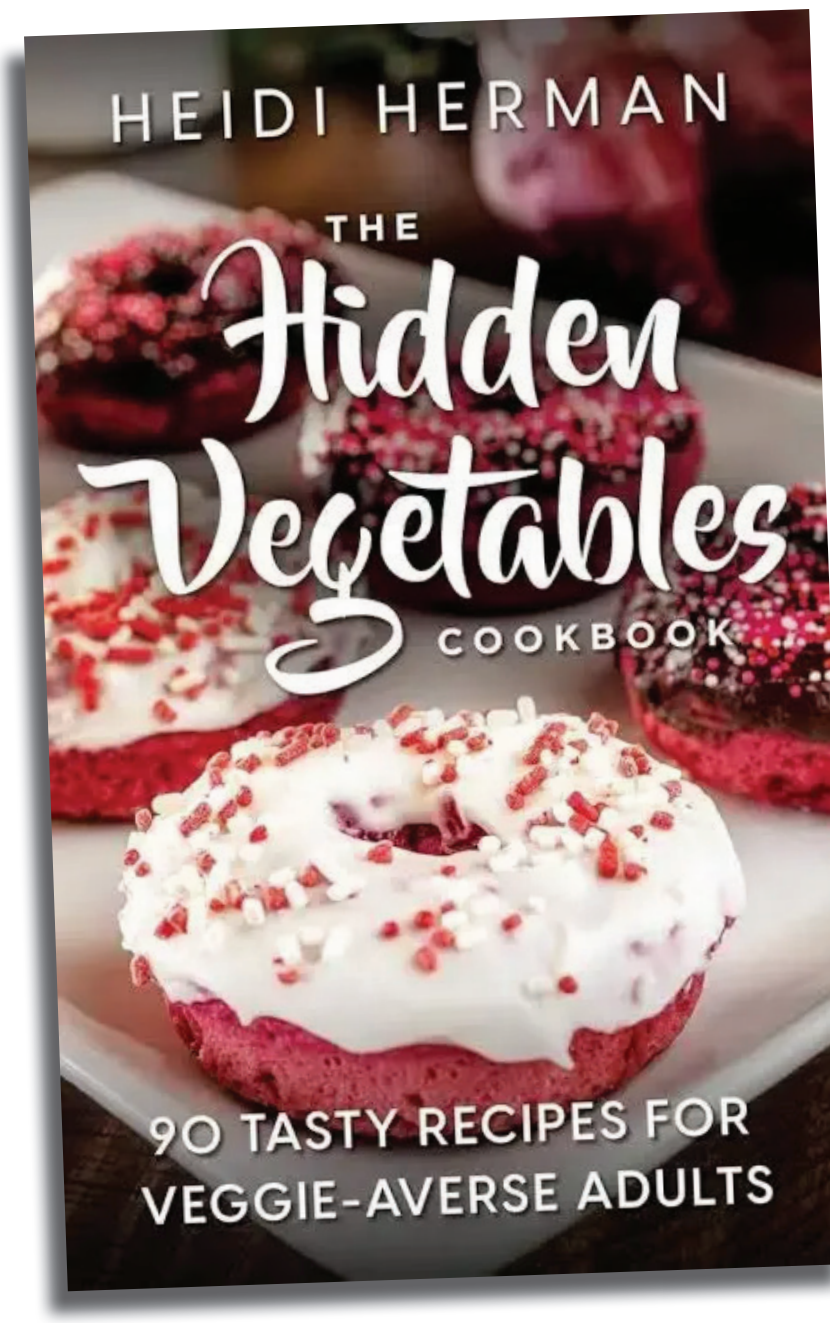
To make the dressing, in a large bowl whisk together the lemon juice, mayonnaise, yogurt, garlic and salt.

Once the potatoes have steam-dried but are still warm, add them to the dressing, toss thoroughly and set aside.

To make the coconut crunch, set a small saucepan over a medium heat and add all the ingredients. Stir continuously for 2 1/2 to 3 minutes, until the coconut has browned and it's looking a little more glossy and sticky. Transfer to a bowl to cool.

To assemble, add the basil zhoug and red onion to the dressed potatoes. Toss gently but thoroughly before transferring everything to a serving plate and scattering with half the coconut crunch, reserving the rest for another use.

To make basil zhoug: Roughly chop 2 garlic cloves and 1 green chile in a blender. Add 1 cup roughly packed basil, 1 cup loosely packed cilantro, 6 3/4 tablespoons olive oil, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, 1 teaspoon hawaij and 1/2 teaspoon of fine sea salt and blend until smooth and emulsified yet retaining some texture. Find hawaij in Middle Eastern markets, or there are plenty of recipes online to make your own.



"The Hidden Vegetables Cookbook," by Heidi Herman. Note that Herman intentionally omits portion sizes and servings due to the variables involved in determining them – how the food will be served, FDA guidelines and personal factors like metabolism, dietary restrictions and more.
Hekla Publishing LLC / TNS

Flash-fried Snow Peas with Hazelnuts and Polenta
Serves 4

This is a celebratory, substantial way to eat possibly author Helen Graham's favorite summer vegetable. You can sub in ground ancho chile if you can't find guajillo, and this recipe also works well with green beans in place of snow peas. From "Centerpiece" by Helen Graham (Hamlyn, 2026).

FOR THE PEAS:
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon, plus 2 tbsp. lemon juice
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
Leaves 1 oz. basil, torn
2 tbsp. olive oil
1 lb. trimmed snow peas
1 1/2 tsp. fine sea salt
For the hazelnut salsa:
1/4 c. olive oil
1/3 c. blanched hazelnuts, toasted and roughly chopped
1/2 teaspoon guajillo chile flakes (see Note)
1 tbsp. toasted sesame seeds
1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/2 tbsp. soy sauce
1 tbsp. maple syrup
1/2 tsp. fine sea salt
FOR THE POLENTA:
2 c. vegetable stock
2 tsp. fine sea salt
8 oz. quick-cooking polenta
3 1/2 tbsp. unsalted butter
1/3 c. finely grated Parmesan cheese

To make the salsa, place the olive oil in a small saucepan and heat until smoking, then turn off and leave to cool for 5 minutes. Or, if you have a food thermometer, heat the oil to 350 degrees. Place the remaining ingredients in a small heatproof bowl and pour over the oil. Mix to combine and set aside.

To make the polenta, bring the stock to a boil in a medium saucepan. Add the salt, then gradually pour in the polenta, whisking continuously to avoid lumps. Reduce the heat and continue whisking for 3-4 minutes until the polenta thickens and the whisk leaves tracks. Stir in the butter and Parmesan and check for seasoning, then turn off the heat and leave, covered, until ready to serve. You may want to add a little water to loosen it to your desired consistency if it firms up before you're ready.

To prepare the peas, put the lemon zest and juice, garlic and basil in a heatproof bowl and stir to combine. Add the olive oil to a frying pan and set over a medium-high heat. Once smoking, add the snow peas and salt and cook for 3 minutes, tossing regularly, until the peas have softened and blistered in places. Add straight to the bowl with the lemon mix and toss to combine.

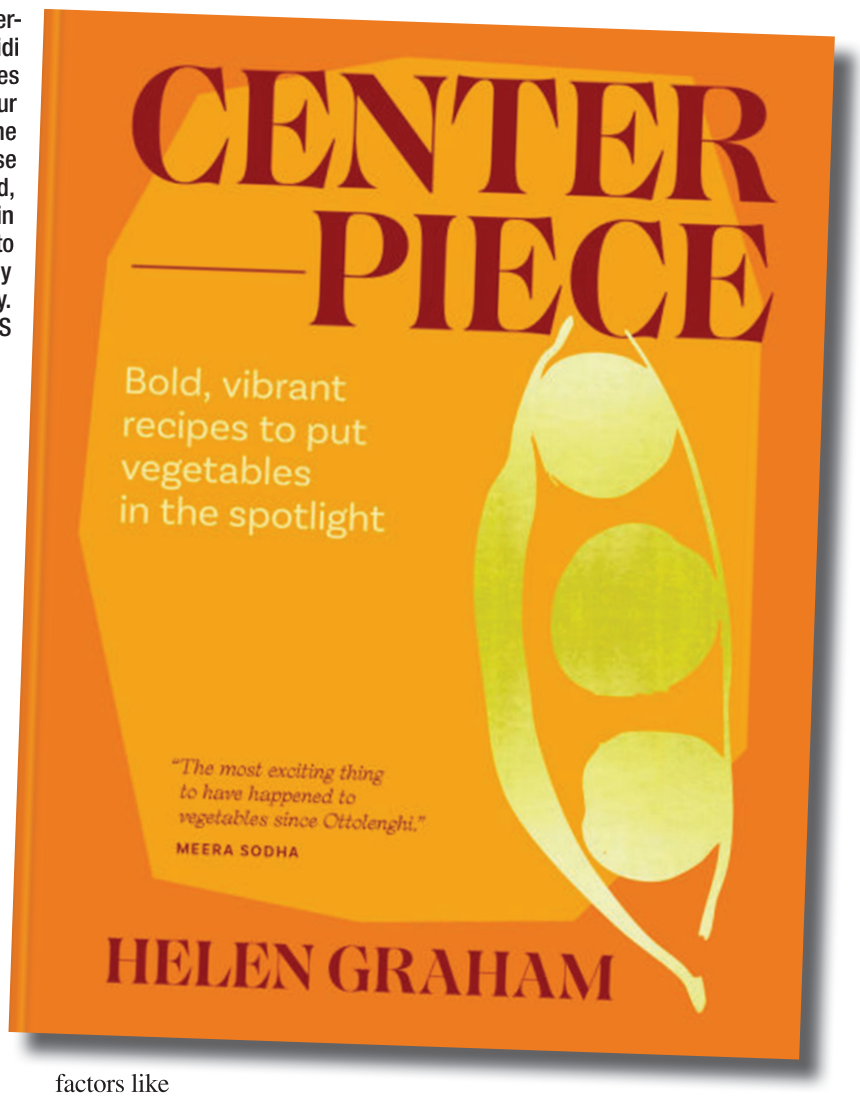
Spoon the polenta on to a serving dish and top with the flash-fried snow peas. Spoon over the hazelnut salsa and serve.

For the veggie averse

Banana Cauliflower Muffins

From "The Hidden Vegetables Cookbook," by Heidi Herman (Hekla, 2025). Note that Herman intentionally omits portion sizes and servings due to the variables involved in determining them – how the food will be served, FDA guidelines and personal factors like metabolism, dietary restrictions and more.

Two new cookbooks – "Centerpiece" by Helen Graham and Heidi Herman's "The Hidden Vegetables Cookbook" – perfectly capture our relationships with vegetables. One touts recipes for "veggie-averse adults," the other advocates "bold, vibrant recipes to put vegetables in the spotlight." Both urge cooks to work vegetables into meals, they just go about it very differently.
Aster / TNS



3 large ripe bananas, mashed
3/4 c. sugar
1 egg
1/3 c. unsalted butter, melted and cooled
1 1/2 c. flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. ginger
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 c. riced cauliflower
Chopped walnuts or pecans, to taste

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Spray a muffin tin with nonstick cooking spray and set aside.

In a large bowl, mash bananas with a fork. Add the sugar, egg and the cooled melted butter and mix until combined.

In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, ginger and salt. Add to the banana mixture and stir until just combined.

Fold in the riced cauliflower and chopped nuts until just combined. Spoon the batter into prepared muffin tin. Bake 20 minutes. Remove muffins from pan immediately; place on a wire rack to cool completely.

Veggie Peanut Chicken and Zucchini Noodles

Note: If you test this recipe and don't like the zucchini noodles, follow instructions but substitute cooked linguine for the zucchini noodles. The sauce is still chockfull of other hidden veggies. From "The Hidden Vegetables Cookbook" by Heidi Herman (Hekla, 2025). Note that Herman intentionally omits portion sizes and servings due to the variables involved in determining them – how the food will be served, FDA guidelines and personal factors like metabolism, dietary restrictions and more.

2 c. water
2 c. chicken or vegetable stock
2 large chicken breasts, quartered
2 whole carrots, peeled and chopped in 2-in. pieces
1 large red bell pepper, seeds removed and quartered.
1 jalapeno, halved and seeds removed, optional
1 tbsp. olive oil
2 tsp. minced garlic
1/2 c. diced leeks
3 large zucchini, spiralized into noodles (see Note)
FOR THE SAUCE:
1/3 c. honey
1/3 c. soy sauce
2 tbsp. sesame oil
2 tbsp. rice vinegar
1 tsp. ginger
1/2 c. creamy peanut butter
1 tbsp. sesame seeds
1 tbsp. dried cilantro
1/2 c. chopped peanuts
1/2 c. minced Brussels sprouts
1 tsp. hot sauce, such as Sriracha

In a large saucepan over medium heat, add water, vegetable stock, chicken, carrots, bell peppers and jalapeno. Bring to a boil and simmer for 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat.

Using a strainer placed over a large pot, pour off liquid and reserve. Place chicken on a plate to cool; shred the chicken once it has cooled and set aside.

Add the cooked vegetables to the bowl of a food processor, along with 1/2 cup of the reserved liquid. (Discard the remaining liquid or save for another use.) Pulse on high until the vegetables are puréed. Set aside.

In a large skillet over medium heat, warm olive oil. Add garlic and leeks and sauté until tender. Add the zucchini noodles and shredded chicken to the skillet.

Cook and stir for about 3 minutes, until chicken is warm and the zucchini is slightly soft, but not mushy. Remove from heat and set aside while you make the sauce.

In a medium saucepan over low heat, mix the honey, soy sauce, sesame oil, rice vinegar, ginger and peanut butter. Whisk constantly until the peanut butter has melted and mixture is smooth.

Add vegetable purée, sesame seeds, cilantro, chopped peanuts, minced Brussels sprouts and hot sauce and heat for 2 to 3 minutes. Pour sauce over chicken and zucchini noodles and toss until combined. Serve immediately.

Cauliflower au Gratin Pasta

Note: For a more flavorful dish, don't be afraid to use stronger cheese or add your favorite spices. Try chili powder for spice, nutmeg or ginger for savory, or diced jalapenos for heat. From "The Hidden Vegetables Cookbook," by Heidi Herman (Hekla, 2025). Note that Herman intentionally omits portion sizes and servings due to the variables involved in determining them – how the food will be served, FDA guidelines and personal factors like metabolism, dietary restrictions and more.

16 oz. dry uncooked pasta, preferably ziti, rotini or bowtie
1 c. riced cauliflower
1 c. diced asparagus
4 tbsp. butter
1/2 c. flour
4 c. milk
1 tbsp. Dijon mustard
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
1 1/2 c. shredded sharp cheddar cheese, divided (see Note)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Using a medium saucepan, prepare pasta to al dente according to package directions. Drain pasta and place in a baking dish. Mix in riced cauliflower and diced asparagus.

Using the same saucepan, melt butter and add the flour, whisking constantly to prevent burning. Slowly whisk in the milk until a thin sauce forms.

Add the Dijon mustard, salt, pepper and half the cheese. Stir until the cheese melts and the sauce is smooth.

Pour sauce over pasta mix. Spread remaining cheese over the top and bake for 10 to 15 minutes, until the cheese melts and is lightly browned. Serve warm.

ENTERTAINMENT

Boots Riley hopes to shoplift your mind with the subversive comedy 'I Love Boosters'

By MARK OLSEN
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Boots Riley attends the "I Love Boosters" premiere during the 2026 SXSW Conference and Festival at The Paramount Theatre on March 12 in Austin, Texas
Tibrina Hobson / Getty Images / TNS.

LOS ANGELES — Boots Riley is in motion. During our recent interview, the writer-director is on the phone while traveling in a car from his home in Oakland to a hotel in San Francisco for a full day promoting his new movie "I Love Boosters." The film had its local premiere the night before at the historic Grand Lake Theater and, rather than sounding morning-after bleary, Riley is energized, overflowing with ideas.

Riley, who, at 55, has been unapologetically calling himself a communist for more than 30 years, brings an unusual level of political commitment and consciousness to his work. "Boosters" is a rascally, freewheeling comedy touched by an absurdist sensibility, but it's also deeply attuned to issues of workers' rights and structures of power. Riley's previous feature, 2018's "Sorry to Bother You," was about a telemarketer who uncovers a larger corporate conspiracy.

All of which is rooted in the much larger goals Riley has his eyes on. Yes, he wants his $20-million movie – the largest production investment ever for its distributor, Neon – to make its money back, but he also wants to convey a forceful message to audiences whether they walk in expecting one or not. Can a movie in wide release across the country and backed by an Oscar-winning studio convey genuinely revolutionary thoughts?

"The world that I hope to see created is one in which the people democratically control the wealth that they create with their labor," Riley says with a mix of calm and charisma that's invigorating. "Now, why do I want that? That has to do with people. I like people and I think there's a way that we can get there in order to counter those in power just doing whatever they want to do."

Even as he veers into heady territory that could seem didactic, Riley maintains a low-key charm like a professor in his off-hours unspooling a few big ideas.

"What I've seen in my life is what makes people get involved in stuff is optimism. And not a disconnected fantasy – optimism that says: We can do this and then this other thing will happen. And so for me, that's not about stale stuff, that's about connecting to the joy of life, connecting to laughter and the beauty of other people."

Raised largely in Oakland, Riley became involved in local activism at a young age. His work as a musician in the years before he turned to filmmaking honed his understanding of audiences and sense of showmanship.

The candy-colored "I Love Boosters" is a movie that isn't afraid to reset itself, evolving and reconfiguring its storytelling as it goes along. Corvette (Keke Palmer) runs a crew of thieves who steal from clothing boutiques, then resell at a significant discount. But what she really wants to be is a designer in the mold of mogul Christie Smith (Demi Moore), who oversees a fashion empire – that is until Corvette comes to understand some of the true costs of Christie's goods, the underpaid human labor that brings it into being.

The cast includes Naomie Ackie and Taylour Paige as Corvette's accomplices, Eiza González as a revolutionary fellow traveler, Poppy Liu as the Chinese factory worker who opens Corvette's eyes to what's really going on and LaKeith Stanfield as an enigmatic stranger who may open her up to much more.

This description of the film does not even begin to include some of its more outrageous features: a teleportation device powered by Marxist dialectics, villains conveyed in stop-motion animation, a thrilling car chase done with miniatures and Don Cheadle in prosthetics that render him practically unrecognizable.

"I Love Boosters" is also the title of a song on the 2006 album "Pick a Bigger Weapon" by Riley's long-running rap group the Coup, including such lines as "Most of it was made by children in Asia / The stores make money off of very low wages." He says the movie isn't a direct adaptation of the song. Rather they are drawn from the same motivations and inspirations.

Since the film's raucous premiere in early March at South by Southwest, Riley figures he has seen it well over 25 times with audiences, in part because he has been on a promotional tour of colleges.

"It's always like a rock show," Riley says. "I've been taking it back to the indie music days and just beating the cement."

Everywhere he has shown the film, audiences have responded in largely the same way, often laughing so loudly they drown out lines of dialogue. To Riley, it means that his stories can travel, finding universal truth in the specific.

"I get underwhelmed by movies that basically are supposed to be any place and anywhere, but then end up being no place and nowhere," he says, "It's contextual to the language you speak and the food you eat and the music you listen to and all of that. I think people have to have a specific point of view and their points of view don't have to be as radical as mine, but they have to really care about something."

Both of Riley's features as well as his 2023 Prime Video streaming series "I'm a Virgo" have a strong, active visual imagination. Pushing things even further with the eye-popping look of "Boosters," he worked with cinematographer Natasha Braier ("The Neon Demon"), costume designer Shirley Kurata (an Oscar nominee for "Everything Everywhere All at Once") and production designer Christopher Glass ("Ms. Marvel"), to make the world of the film as inventive as possible.

"For me, I'm heightening contradictions," Riley says of his film's handmade aesthetic. "That's also something I bring from music. You can talk all the time about what technically should work, but what matters is making you feel a certain thing."

Riley is mindful that his film's more outré moments don't detract from the underlying emotions he is trying to convey. Also that it be fun.

"Music videos, for instance, they're interesting to look at but they're not often moving," he says. "So what I have to do, my main thing that ties all this together, is humanity. And I get that through the character writing and the story, but also through the performances. I have to combine all of those things to make the visceral parts work, to connect to the character's emotions. And even if you don't get it consciously, you'll just feel this movement as you go."

Stanfield, who also starred in "Sorry to Bother You," recalls first meeting Riley at a party at the Sundance Film Festival.

"I liked the fact that he had a really big afro," says Stanfield in a separate call from San Francisco the morning after the Bay Area premiere, "and he had mutton-chop kind of sideburns and I was like: I like this dude's style, man. I like the fact that he's able to just be himself."

Stanfield's laconic intensity is the perfect foil for Riley's own unpredictability. The actor recalls Riley first telling him about what would become his character in "I Love Boosters" before the script was even written.

"He just said that it's going to be a character unlike any character you played, which is true," says Stanfield. "And that it's someone that is trying to find a way to connect to others. And this guy has been alive since the beginning of time. And I was like, 'Oh, this is very interesting.' And it turned out to be all of those things."

Riley is unusually active online, often mixing it up with fans and detractors alike on social media. Recently he got into an extended series of posts on the platform X, where he was attacked for working with with producer Megan Ellison, daughter of tech billionaire Larry Ellison and sister of Paramount Skydance chairman David Ellison.

"It's part of how I engage with the world," he says matter-of-factly. "Whether it's worth my time or not, that's a whole other thing."

Riley acknowledges that there is rarely ethically pure money to be found in the world, so that financing for something like a feature film will likely have to come from sources unlikely to pass strict purity tests.

"So there's no getting out of it," he says with a sense of thought-through clarity. "And also, that's not my goal. That never was part of my goal. My goal is to help create class struggle and help to create this mass militant, radical labor movement."

By this time, Riley has hopped out of his car and – as signaled by the "thank yous" and "you're welcomes" that punctuate his responses – made his way to where he will finish getting ready before his press day. None of which stops the flow of ideas.

"There's many other reasons to decry and be against what Larry Ellison is doing," Riley continues. "Because it's old school, robber baron sort of s---. And I do speak out about that. But my point is, we've got to have some power to change the way things are and that power is only going to come from being able to have the working class stop capital when it wants."

A deep analysis of class dynamics and labor is already unusual enough from a filmmaker. And then there are the hats. Riley has taken to wearing outsized hats for most press events for the new film, a look that is as distinctive as it can be an invitation to parody. He currently has about six in rotation in a variety of colors and gets them from the London shop Uptown Yardie, which makes them in tribute to Jamaican heritage.

As with many things in the Boots Riley universe, the hats are partly fanciful and partly practical. He started wearing them in 2022 or so and last year intended to retire them because they can be cumbersome to travel with.

And yet he discovered they had another purpose.

"I read a thing with [Jean-Luc] Godard talking about how he had to make himself this character to sell his movies," Riley says. "And you don't think about Godard thinking about marketing. And so for me, I was like, 'I gotta sell this movie. Let me bring the hat back out.'"

MOVIE REVIEW

Nicola Goode / Lucasfilm LTD / TNS

From left to right: The Mandalorian (Pedro Pascal) and Grogu in Lucasfilm's "The Mandalorian and Grogu."

The Force is dull in this *'The Mandalorian and Grogu'*

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

'Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu'

★★

Running time: 2 hours 12 minutes

Rated PG-13 for sci-fi violence and action.

Where to watch: In theaters

Not to shock anyone, but it's important to disclose that I've never seen an episode of "The Mandalorian" (or any "Star Wars" show). But the breakout star of the series, "Baby Yoda," aka "The Child," aka Grogu, has become a ubiquitous pop cultural sensation, so it's nearly impossible to go in completely cold to the big screen adaptation of the series, "Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu." Still, I can report that it's possible to go in colder than most and still maintain your footing, to alleviate any concerns of fellow casual "Star Wars" fans.

That's because "Mandalorian and Grogu" director and co-writer Jon Favreau, and co-writers Dave Filoni and Noah Kloor, traffic in easily digestible tropes, archetypes and genre references. The story is like an old-fashioned film serial blown up to blockbuster proportions, set in a world that has dominated pop culture for almost 50 years. The remnants of a crumbling empire, a bounty hunter with a heart of gold, a cute green guy who wields the Force – what's not to get?

How Mando (Pedro Pascal under the helmet) and Grogu linked up has been covered in the series, so if you're a die-hard fan, there's not a lot of repeat or recap. Essentially, what you need to know is that the story is set in the period between the original "Star Wars" trilogy (ending with "Return of the Jedi") and the sequel trilogy (starting with "The Force Awakens"). The Galactic Empire has fallen, replaced with the New Republic. While former Imperial warlords drift about, trying to amass power, the New Republic sends out the Mandalorian to haul them back to headquarters to snitch on their comrades. Reparations and justice for corrupt and evil fascists – we simply love to see it.

Favreau's film plays like another installment in the Mando and Grogu adventures: We meet up with them mid-raid, which results in a dead target, and doesn't please his boss, Colonel Ward (Sigourney Weaver). Still, she sends them on to their next assignment, doing some dirty work for the criminal gangster organization the Hutts. Jabba's son Rotta (Jeremy Allen White) is missing, and his aunt and uncle would like him back. While Mando hates to work for the Hutts, they've promised intel on a very promising, and very elusive, Imperial leader.

When they find Rotta (weirdly buff for a Hutt) in the fighting pits of the urban enclave Shakari – thanks to information from a food vendor voiced by Martin Scorsese – Mando is surprised to find that Rotta's not inclined to return to his family. White's actorly presence comes through in his vocal performance, lending the beleaguered fighter a sense of depressed world-weariness and poignant ennui.

But this plot point kicks off a narrative whirlpool in which "The Mandalorian and Grogu" finds itself trapped – Mando is knocked out cold, wakes up in an unfamiliar spot, and then has to fight a bunch of CGI beasties. This happens at least three times in the film, and it gets repetitive. The nods to Ray Harryhausen monster movies are appreciated, but it quickly loses its novelty.

The film takes its cues from those old timey epics, as well as from Westerns and samurai movies – anything with a lone fighter who lives by a code and has a desire to fiercely protect his loved ones. There's an element of the classic Western "Shane" as Mando fights to protect his diminutive sidekick, and Pascal delivers his quips ("Fighting's not a sport, it's a last resort," etc.) with John Wayne-style panache.

But with his helmet hiding his face (to take it off is shameful), and most of the characters computer-generated, our emotional touchpoint throughout remains a puppet – Grogu. With his huge eyes, baby coos and little shuffle, he's been engineered to elicit cute aggression from audiences and everyone he encounters, including Rotta, and various creatures who help him along the way, resulting in a wave of deus ex machina story beats where someone swoops in to save the day. Over and over, Mando finds himself in a jam but we never think he's in any real danger, because would this kiddie-skewing "Star Wars" actually force Grogu to grapple with grief?

Ludwig Göransson's expressive score does much of the emotional heavy lifting too. He peppers in an electronic techno theme among the sweeping orchestral stuff for a feel that's both '80s retro and distinctly modern; when the film pauses for Grogu's moment of heroism it's quietly atmospheric and curious. The score is the single best element of filmmaking on display, because the cinematography is a desaturated CGI mish-mosh.

Grogu's cuteness may be a powerful force, but it's not enough to sustain this big screen leap, especially in a blockbuster this bloated, and frankly, dull. If it feels like a serial, maybe it should have stayed a series.

MOVIE REVIEW

'I Love Boosters' is a crazy carnival with a deeper meaning

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

'I Love Boosters'

★★★ ½

Running time: 1 hour 45 minutes

Rated R for strong sexual content, nudity, language throughout and brief drug use.

Where to watch: in theaters

Stepping into the mind of Boots Riley is always a wild and radicalizing ride. The Oakland-based rapper, activist and filmmaker burst onto the Hollywood scene with his scathing, absurdist corporate satire "Sorry To Bother You" in 2018, and his sophomore feature, "I Love Boosters," is just as wacky, colorful, and galvanizing as his first film, perhaps even more so.

Much has happened since 2018, when Riley took aim at corporate greed and conspiracy at a telemarketing firm, where a young black man uses a "white voice" in order to succeed. There's been a pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, public sentiment turning against tech oligarchs, and Riley, who joined the Progressive Labor Party at age 15, remains laser-focused on workers, unions and solidarity. In "I Love Boosters," he takes his message from the local to the global, demonstrating how economically interconnected we all are.

Keke Palmer stars as Corvette, the leader of a group of shoplifters that includes her friends, the pragmatic Sade (Naomi Ackie) and the dreamy Mariah (Taylour Paige). They "boost" luxury clothing and resell it on the black market, while Corvette dreams of becoming a designer herself, idolizing the brilliant-but-quirky fashion mogul Christie Smith (Demi Moore).

But "I Love Boosters" is not the story of Corvette's ascent into a traditional industry, but of her growing disillusionment with aspirational billionaire idol worship and her awakening to solidarity across borders. The fashion world is the perfect setting for Riley's tale, both aesthetically and symbolically. The lush, over-the-top costumes by Shirley Kurata are nothing less than high art, and fit perfectly with Riley's cartoonish, absurdist style. But clothing is also a ubiquitous human necessity in everyday life. And we're often blind to the conditions under which it is made, as workers in overseas factories crank out merchandise under dangerous conditions.

Clothing and fashion also provide a fascinating symbol for Riley to play with shifting, socially constructed notions of value – items can be stolen, but what about ideas? Why are people (often the upper class) morally offended by the idea of shoplifting but not worker exploitation or the theft of intellectual property? Why are some economic markets socially acceptable and others illegal, and who decides that status anyway? Riley asks us to at least ponder these questions rather than just accepting "the way things are."

Neon / TNS

"I Love Boosters," a film written and directed by Boots Riley.

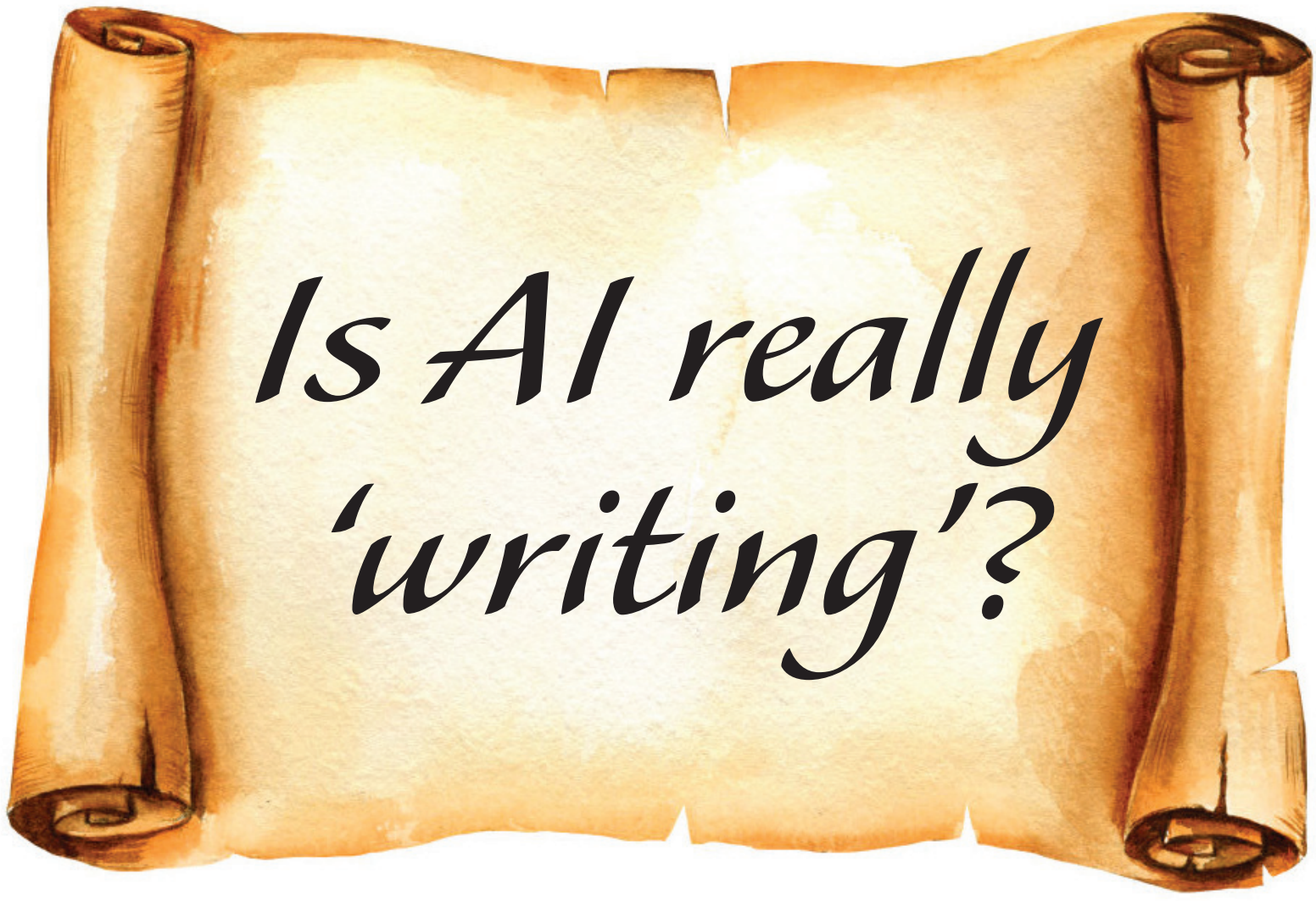
To pull off their biggest heist yet, Corvette and her girls infiltrate the business and get jobs at one of Christie Smith's retail outposts, where they're managed by fussy Grayson (Will Poulter) and meet the disgruntled, radical Violeta (Eiza González), who is trying to pull together a strike. But they're distracted by a new booster on the scene, Jianhu (Poppy Liu), who has popped out of nowhere with a strange new technology on her hands: a portable teleporter. It turns out she's an emissary from one of Christie's Chinese clothing factories, where workers are becoming sick from exposure to the chemicals used for denim sandblasting. She and her cousin steal the teleporter, developed for shipping, in order to hurt Christie's company, holding the clothes hostage, and demanding better worker treatment.

Ergo, "I Love Boosters" is Riley's "Norma Rae." It's also, in a manner of speaking, his "Heat," combining the heist movie with the union movie in his own crazy signature style. And does it ever get crazy. Like "Sorry To Bother You," "I Love Boosters" comes dangerously close to careening all the way off the rails at times, especially when Violeta is explaining the properties of the teleporter device – which also deconstructs and accelerates situations – using the philosophy of dialectical materialism (we can have a little Marxism, as a treat). Or, when a group of flesh-exposed bodies, relieved of their skin suits, engage Corvette in a high-speed chase around downtown after the crew disrupts Christie's fashion show. Whatever Riley's having, pass it around.

That's the beauty of Riley's work: He invites you into his wacky, exhilarating, profane, political carnival where everything has a deeper meaning. Take, for example, Corvette's real name, Cassandra, the Greek mythological figure whose spoken prophecies are often ignored. In his surrealist modern fables, Riley employs monstrous mythological types, like Lakeith Stanfield's seducer figure, a demon who literally sucks women dry, a distraction that Corvette has to avoid like an obstacle on her road to enlightenment.

At times, "I Love Boosters" almost loses the plot, and we almost lose a foothold in reality. But the performances are funny and charming, particularly Paige, and Palmer grounds the emotional core of Corvette's journey. For such heavy political themes and rallying cries to action, Riley makes it wildly entertaining, with eye-popping visuals, and a circus-inspired score by Tune-Yards. What's most important is that among all the mishaps and misadventures, his message never loses its clarity: Liberation is for everyone, and, most importantly, it should be fun.

BOOKS



Tatiana Arefyeva / Getty Images

From a priestess to philosophers, ancient authors would have said 'no'

By RYAN LEACK
USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences (The Conversation)

THE CONVERSATION

I teach writing and rhetoric, but my college students and I often overlook a surprisingly complicated question: What is writing?

And can artificial intelligence really do it?

Many people think of "writing" as putting words on a page. However, even from very early on, writers have seen their craft as something more. From Enheduanna, the first named author on record, to Plato and Aristotle, writing has been portrayed and defined in ways that suggest AI may not be "writing" at all.

If not, what should we call AI text? ChatGPT and I have an idea.

Praising and pleading

Enheduanna, who lived around 2,300 B.C.E., was a powerful princess, priestess and poet of the Akkadian Empire, in what is now Iraq. She has been celebrated as the earliest known writer, though the authorship of her poems and hymns is debated.

One of her poems, "The Exaltation of Inanna," reveals a sense of what writing is and does – portraying it as a living medium that expresses experience and shapes the future.

First, the poem praises the ancient Mesopotamian goddess Inanna, who was associated with fertility and war, among other powers. "My Lady, you are the guardian / Of all greatness," Enheduanna says, in a translation by Jane Hirschfield.

That praise may be strategic. It is followed by Enheduanna's plea to overthrow Lugal-Ane, a rebel king who she describes exiling her and taking her post at the temple of Ur. "Now I have been cast out / To the place of lepers," she writes, describing her suffering. "Day comes, / And the brightness / Is hidden around me."

Grieving, Enheduanna writes a new destiny. In a translation by Sophus Helle, the priestess envisions Inanna coming to her aid and "tear[ing] off this fate, Lugale-Ane." And her pleading seems to be successful: The end of the poem depicts Enheduanna restored to her post.

In Enheduanna's poetry, writing does not simply communicate information. It interacts with the present and changes the future. The priestess's pleas please the goddess, move her heart, and she restore Enheduanna to her post – though historians have little evidence of whether an exile and return really happened.

But her poetry did have real-world influence, helping to create religious and political unity in the world's first empire. For example, her writing merged the Sumerian goddess Inanna with the Akkadian goddess Ishtar, describing a single "Queen of Heaven."

AI writing can be used to try to create change, such as by swaying someone's political opinion. But it lacks the human emotions that make experiences like praise, gratitude and suffering possible – the emotions and motivations that make writing a living medium with real-world effects.

Transforming over informing

Two thousand years after Enheduanna, Plato and his student Aristotle offered another influential view of writing – one that complements hers.

In the "Phaedrus," which discusses the relationship between love and rhetoric, Plato famously defines writing as a poor copy of speech. Speech's job is to represent thoughts; thoughts, in turn, represent knowledge and truth. Similarly, Aristotle writes, "Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words."

Even that definition marks a sharp contrast with AI, which lacks thoughts and mental experiences. Its output proceeds from data aggregation and text generation.

To understand what writing is, we also need to look at what it does. Although Plato elevates speech over writing, he suggests in "Phaedrus" that good writing may lead a learner toward truth and knowledge. Similar to Enheduanna, he employs writing as a tool for change, both inside and outside the text.

In Plato's dialogues, characters often radically change their opinions. And today, almost 2,500 years after his death, the philosopher's real-world impact is clear. For instance, universities and colleges today are collectively called the "Academy" because that was the name of Plato's group, the first institution of higher learning in the West. English scholar Alfred North Whitehead famously wrote that all Western philosophy is "a series of footnotes to Plato."

Aristotle's voluminous works, too, show writing's purpose transcends communication. In "Rhetoric," for instance, he details ways to make writing persuasive. Aristotle defines rhetoric as a way of "moving souls," not just exchanging knowledge.

For both of the Greek philosophers, then, writing is more about transformation than information.

Today, however, AI tools' popularity may make writing less dynamic and less moving. Use of AI risks a "blandification" of writing, according to a study led by computer science professor Natasha Jaques. In other words, much AI writing today lacks distinct voices, making it sound the same – which could make people's thinking more similar, too.

'Generwriting'

Overall, these three ancient authors agree that writing emerges from thoughts and experiences – a process that strives to create change. Enheduanna, Plato and Aristotle also agree that writing's essence transcends the simple summaries and information transmission common to AI output today.

Although AI can generate creative texts, its writing may not "move souls" the way human writing does. Several studies show a "pro-human attribution bias" or an "AI penalty," meaning that people prefer human writing even when AI writing is stylistically similar. People want to read what other people write, not what an algorithm pumps out.

Perhaps we need a different word for AI's output. Common terms today include "generative content" and "synthetic text," but I wondered if I could land on something simpler – and involve AI itself. After prompting and tweaking ChatGPT over and over, I settled on one word: "generwrite."

Though AI is here to stay, new words may help distinguish types of text. And as Enheduanna, Plato and Aristotle remind us, there are elements of writing that may always be unique to embodied, thinking beings striving to move souls.

Ryan Leack is an assistant professor of writing at USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, May 9, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

Hardcover fiction

1. Fury Bound. Sable Sorensen. Requited
2. 26 Beauties. James Patterson. Little, Brown
3. Yesteryear. Caro Claire Burke. Knopf
4. The Calamity Club. Kathryn Stockett. Spiegel & Grau
5. Platform Decay. Martha Wells. Tor
6. The Things We Never Say. Elizabeth Strout. Random House
7. Twisted (collector's ed.). Emily McIntire. Bloom
8. Starside (deluxe ed.). Alex Aster. Avon
9. The Mother-Daughter Book Club. Patterson/Patterson. Little, Brown
10. The Night We Met (deluxe ed.). Abby Jimenez. Forever

Hardcover nonfiction

1. Birth Vibes. Jen Hamilton. Grand Central
2. The Case for America. Bret Baier. Mariner
3. Strangers. Belle Burden. Dial
4. The Mission Generation. Gupta/Fewer. Wiley
5. The U.S. Constitution. Melissa Murray. 37 Ink
6. Mom, I Want to Hear Your Story. Jeffrey Mason. Hear Your Story
7. Famesick. Lena Dunham. Random House
8. True Crime. Patricia Cornwell. Grand Central
9. Through Mom's Eyes. Sheinelle Jones. Putnam
10. The Power of Beliefs. Shawn Achor. Crown Currency

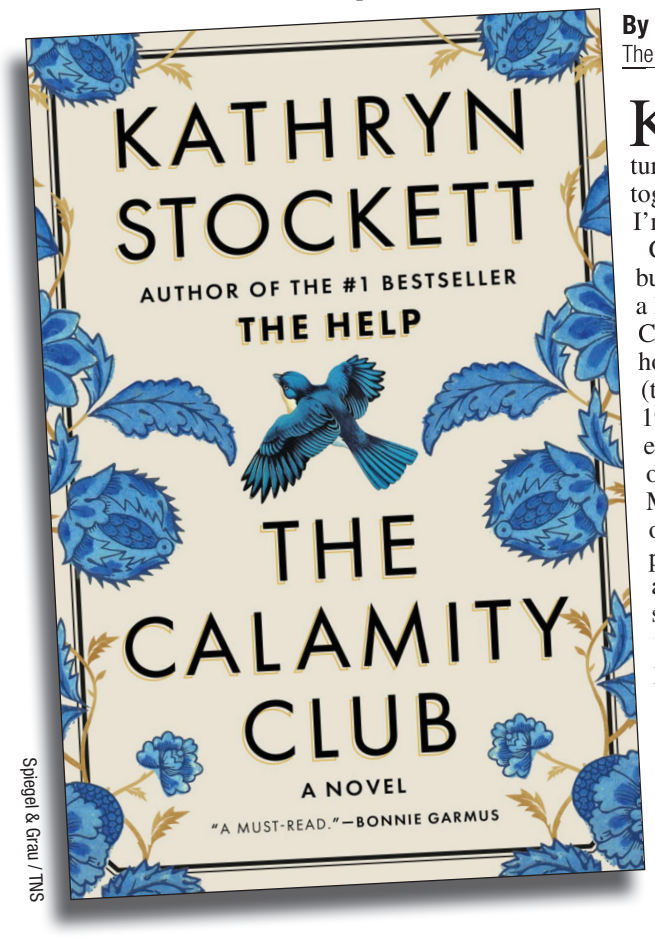
Trade paperback

1. Theo of Golden. Allen Levi. Atria
2. The Daisy Chain Flower Shop. Laurie Gilmore. HarperCollins
3. Rules for the Summer. Meghan Quinn. Bloom
4. The Next War. Tsarfati/Yohn. Ten Peaks
5. Dungeon Crawler Carl. Matt Dinniman. Ace
6. King of Gluttony. Ana Huang. Bloom
7. Game On. Navessa Allen. Slowburn
8. Dear Debbie. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
9. Want to Know a Secret? Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
10. The Jesus Discoveries. Jeremiah J. Johnston. Bethany House

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

REVIEW

It took 17 years but 'The Help' author finally has a new book



Spiegel & Grau / TNS

By CHRIS HEWITT
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Kathryn Stockett has written a huge book about three 20th century Mississippi women who come together despite their differences. No, I'm not talking about "The Help."

Coming 17 years after that blockbuster, Stockett's second novel has a lot in common with her first. "The Calamity Club" also is set in her home state, takes place in the past (this time, the 1930s rather than the 1960s) and is about a trio of strangers who create a community with other women. The protagonists are Meg, who is 11 and has lived in an orphanage since her mother disappeared; Birdie, who is 24, a virgin, and always takes care of others instead of herself; and 30ish Charlie, who doesn't show up for about 200 pages and who launches a business venture with Birdie.

As in "The Help," men are subsidiary characters in "The Calamity Club," but their actions define the lives of the women. Meg's mysterious father has doomed both her and, we eventually learn, Charlie. The men who govern the state have declared Meg "feebleminded," although her tartly brilliant narrative voice is a constant reminder of what a lie that is. And it's the departure of Birdie's brother-in-law Rory (husband of Birdie's selfish sister Frances) that leads to Birdie, Charlie and a posse of pals turning an ancestral home into something they call a "dance club." Although not much dancing occurs there.

All three protagonists are compelling, but Meg is the star of "The Calamity Club." She owes a debt to other smart, lonely girls of Southern literature – especially Frankie, from Carson McCullers' "The Member of the Wedding" – but her voice is singular and laugh-out-loud funny.

"It must have been a dead scientist or a old Roman who decided each day has the same number of minutes," Meg says. "Whoever it was, let me tell you, it is not true. By ten in the morning, I would swear a couple years have passed while I been sitting in this office. Lord, I might have turned fourteen just waiting on lunch. By five o'clock, I would not be surprised to look down and see I had grown bosoms."

Resourceful and optimistic, despite many setbacks, Meg is impossible not to love. Actually, that's also true of more reserved Birdie, who travels to the mansion her sister shares with her husband and mother-in-law and who reports, in a letter, "Frances's house has more indoor bathrooms than they have rear ends."

Those vibrant narrators keep you reading "Calamity Club" even when things flag in the middle of the book, which didn't need about 100 of its 632 pages, and even when you notice that the Meg/Frankie resemblance isn't the only borrowing from Southern classics (naming supporting characters Welty and Tartt may be Stockett's way of acknowledging her debt to predecessors such as Eudora Welty and Donna Tartt, as well as Tennessee Williams).

In the end, the familiarity of "The Calamity Club" works in its favor. We recognize this territory, even if the daring "dance hall" is new – and, as the employees wait for lawmen to cop to what they're doing, suspenseful – territory.

As in most books with multiple narrators, you'll probably miss your favorite when they're not narrating. For my money, there's not enough Meg in "The Calamity Club." But Stockett deftly unites her three main characters for an ending that's as cozy and satisfying as the chicken pot pies her characters keep making and eating.

AUTOMOTIVE

AUTO REVIEWS

Lexus RX 450h+ plug-in hybrid crossover dishes style and luxury no matter where you roam

By CASEY WILLIAMS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Photos by Lexus / TNS

2026 Lexus RX 450h+

Five-passenger, AWD Crossover

Powertrain: 2.5-liter I4, PHEV

Output: 304hp/415 pound-feet of torque

Suspension f/r: Ind/Ind

Wheels f/r: 21”/21” alloy

Brakes f/r: regen disc/disc

0-60 mph: 6.2s

Electric range: 38 miles

Fuel economy: 85 mpg-e/35 mpg

Assembly: Kyushu, Japan

Base/As-tested price: $52,275/$77,595

My mother-in-law took quite a journey to find her latest ride. She considered the Toyota Prius, impressed by its sleek style, utility and hybrid fuel economy. She liked the much larger Toyota Crown hybrid even more. But what she really wanted was legit luxury, and she found her vibe with the Lexus RX 350 crossover.

It was an excellent choice, but I like the 2026 RX 450h+ plug-in even better.

The RX is a modern car, but nothing wildly futuristic. The front features Lexus’ trademark spindle grille, flanked by squinty LED headlamps. The side profile is more crossover coupe planted over 21-inch wheels. A swoosh from the front rocker into the fat rear fenders adds sportiness while the floating rear roof conveys a sense of speed. You can park the original 1998 RX 300 next to the 2026 RX 450h+ and know one begat the other.

There’s a pretty large cargo hold behind the hands-free hatch, and the split/fold rear seats power up/down to toss in bicycles or surfboards, but the sloping roofline isn’t the best for large cargo. If hauling gear is a priority, you might consider the larger and squarer Lexus TX crossover.

The RX 450h+ is absolutely beautiful inside with contrasting leathers, soft quilting on the doors and wood on the steering wheel. Front seats are heated and ventilated; rear seats and the steering wheel warm too. Ambient lighting seeps from every crevice. Mark Levinson audio adds lush layers of sound. The cabin is kept light and airy via the panoramic glass roof.

Flatscreen gauges and a 14-inch touchscreen provide infotainment. Devices connect wirelessly through Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and they charge wirelessly too. Of course, safety is paramount, with automatic emergency braking, blind spot intervention, and rear cross traffic alert. The digital rearview mirror, head-up display and emergency steering assist up the ante.

You may be trying to decide if you want an EV, hybrid, or just a plain gas-powered vehicle. While my mother-in-law chose the regular hybrid, the 450h+ adds the ability to drive 38 miles without burning a drop of gas. For daily use, it’s an EV. However, there’s also a 2.5-liter gas engine that carries on when batteries deplete. Drive anywhere without worries. All in, it’s EPA rated 85 mpg-e. Running as a regular hybrid away from plugs, expect 35 mpg.

I think owners most appreciate how serenely the 2026 RX 450h+ travels. Tepid acceleration of 0-60 mph in 6.2 seconds won’t excite Tesla owners, but it’s delightfully smooth and quiet. You slide in at exactly the right height and are greeted by an interior fit for a luxury crossover. Whether you’re 30 years old or 80, it fits right. With Toyota build quality, my mother-in-law will have many years to enjoy hers.

Expect to pay dearly. A base RX starts at $52,275, but moving up to a plug-in hybrid costs at least $66,680. Our lush test vehicle came to $77,595. Competitors include the BMW X3, Cadillac XT5, Genesis GV70, Lincoln Nautilus, Mercedes-Benz GLC, and Volvo XC60.

LIKES: modern style, lush interior, electric commuting

DISLIKES: limited cargo, tepid acceleration, luxury pricing

Casey Williams is an Indianapolis-based automotive journalist and a long-time contributor to the Chicago Tribune.

Mazda fixed the CX-5 ... except for the turbo-4

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

2026 Mazda CX-5

★★★

Vehicle type: Front-engine, all-wheel drive, five-passenger SUV

Price: $31,485, including $1,495 destination fee ($41,080 Premium Plus as tested)

Power plant: 2.5-liter inline four-cylinder

Power: 187 horsepower, 185 pound-feet of torque

Transmission: Six-speed automatic

Weight: 3,856 pounds

Performance: 0-60 mph, 8.2 seconds (Car and Driver est.); top speed, 116 mph

Fuel economy

EPA est.: 24 city/30 highway/26 combined

Report card

High: Sporty SUV loaded with standard goodies; Tesla-like touchscreen

Lows: No knobs; bring back the 257-horse turbo-4, please?

Rarely do I attack a 180-degree cloverleaf with an SUV. Exiting I-75 in the all-new 2026 Mazda CX-5, I activated SPORT mode, stabbed the brakes, then rotated the 3,856-pound ute into the looooong turn, hugging the apex until the all-season tires screamed in protest. The CX-5 stayed true.

Yep, the CX-5’s poised handling hasn’t changed.

But everything else has. After lagging the segment in touchscreen ergonomics and interior room, the third-generation CX-5 has been remade as a roomy, cutting-edge tool for the digital age. But for the curious absence of Mazda’s turbocharged engine alternative, CX-5 is a high five.

Job One: The touchscreen

As an aspirational premium brand, Mazda made a splash with the second-gen CX-5 in 2017, equipping it with a chic remote-rotary-controlled infotainment screen in the fashion of luxury brands Audi and BMW. Mazda engineers also embraced the technology because it allowed them to move the touchless screen forward on the dash where it was more in the line of the driver’s road view.

But as smartphones took over the world – and our cars – Tesla-like touchscreens were the rage. We were driving iPhones on wheels! BMW quickly fell in line with a touchscreen to complement the rotary i-Drive it had, ahem, invented. So, too, Genesis. Audi went touchscreen, and suddenly ... Mazda’s system was unfashionable.

And unloved. My son looooves his Mazda3, except for the clumsy remote controller.

So for its current gen, Mazda has gone full Tesla. My $41K Premium Plus tester sports a big 15.6-inch screen (12-incher standard). No remote rotary dial. No buttons. No knobs.

Everything is controlled in the screen. Well, almost everything. You can still adjust your mirrors and steering column manually (Tesla puts even those functions in-screen). And an automatic shifter still anchors the console.

“Hey, Google,” I barked to the Google-based software system. “Change driver temperature to 70 degrees.”

Who needs a climate knob?

Clean, sculpted interiors are the new luxury fashion. Think Tesla, Lincoln, Rivian, Polestar. Mazda already pens some of the best interiors in the business, and the updated, minimalist aesthetic conforms with the simple flowing lines of the exterior. Wrap it in my tester’s Soul Red, and it makes for a lovely date.

Job Two: Vroom with room

Obsessed with making driver’s cars, Mazda has never been overly concerned with passenger legroom. The subcompact CX-30 is tight, the CX-5 small for class. Heck, the brand’s halo MX-5 Miata doesn’t even have a backseat.

But the 2026 CX-5 hopefully changes all that. The Mazda ute gains a healthy 4.8 inches in wheelbase, which translates to excellent rear legroom and cargo space.

With its biggest shortcomings fixed, CX-5 turns up the volume on its signature design and tech. At its core is a redesigned steering wheel that is a delicious, functional command center.

Like a chocolate tart, it is a perfect, black, round confection. Two spokes frame it on either side like a knife and fork. In the middle of the spokes are two round circles that echo the round tart. Shades of Tesla and its rollers.

The Mazda circles aren’t as functional as Tesla rollers, alas – and I miss the previous-gen CX-5 rocker switches used to navigate volume and adaptive cruise speed. The circles do, however, anchor your thumbs so you can find those features when needed.

Because Mazdas are loaded with standard features.

Forget my loaded, $41,080 tester – at $31K, the CX-5 is stuffed with standard all-wheel drive, adaptive cruise control, blind-spot assist, wireless Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, adaptive windshield wipers, adaptive headlights and a deployable drone (kidding about that last one).

My Premium Plus model adds a Cruising & Traffic support feature to augment ACC.

On I-75, I toggled the C&T button on the wheel, and a green steering wheel icon illuminated on the dash. Not a blue one, mind you (that means hands-free in Tesla, GM products, Rivian models and Subaru Outback), but green meant I could relax with just a coupla fingers on the wheel while the car did the rest.

It made for a smooth trip south.

Until I, ahem, exited and encountered another cloverleaf. SPORT mode time.

Job Three: where’d the vroom go?

Exiting the cloverleaf, I buried my left foot, and got ... just 187 horsepower.

For $40K, the last-gen model (and its CX-50 sibling) offered a Turbo model powered by a terrific, 257-horse turbo-4 that made the Mazda a BMW X3 killer for $20K less.

Put its name on a milk carton. It’s gone missing.

The only engine available for 2026 is the standard 2.5-liter, normally-aspirated four-banger. It’s mated to Mazda’s best-in-segment, liquid-smooth automatic six-speed. Word on the street is that the CX-5 will add the 217-horsepower hybrid (introduced for the CX-50 for a sippy 39 mpg highway compared to 30 mpg for my 2.5-liter egg-beater) and be competitive with, say, the Honda CR-V.

But this premium performance SUV deserves more.

With its knife-like steering carving up roads and high-tech interior, the turbo-4 made it transcendent – one of the best values in the industry. Happily, you can still buy it in the 2026 CX-50 for $39,395. I trust it will follow in the CX-5 soon for leadfoots willing to wait.

My top-drawer Premium Plus model brings nice ergonomic features like an expansive head-up display to complement the center jumbotron. But even the $33,485 Select model (second from base) boasts standard features that made my daily life comfortable.

Features like a wireless charging pad so that my Android never ran out of juice while navigating the Michigan landscape. Mrs. Payne brought along a tall sports bottle. It fit comfortably in the door cupholder, which was cantilevered forward so tall flasks could clear the armrest.

I opened the rear hatch to throw in our bags. I folded the rear seats flat for more room. And underneath the rear carpet is an easy-access spare tire should you be attacked by a Detroit pothole.

Tesla big screens were a revelation last decade, in part because they gave you something to do while sitting for a half-hour at Superchargers. With 450 miles of range and a two-minute gas fill-up, waits to stock up on energy are not a thing for CX-5.

But should you find yourself waiting around with impatient kiddies in tow, Google Built-in brings with it a suite of apps to take advantage of Mazda’s new touchscreen pride and joy. Apps like (with a subscription) YouTube or my favorite: Beach Buggy Racing 2.

For most drivers, though, the CX-5 in SPORT mode is entertainment enough.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

TECHNOLOGY

GADGETS

Stay ahead of car trouble

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

BlueDriver / TNS
BlueDriver Pro Scan tool.

How annoying is it to get in your vehicle and your check engine light or other alerts suddenly flash in your face? The BlueDriver Pro Scan tool will tell you almost instantly what the problem is, and potentially keep you ahead of a breakdown.

This pocket-sized diagnostic tool does big things. Just plug it into your car's OBDII port to get live data and professional-grade diagnostics. It helps you identify potential maintenance issues with your vehicle. Using it is simple. You don't need advanced mechanical knowledge. The tool provides information to help you decide whether your vehicle needs your trusted mechanic.

If you're like me, you don't know about your vehicle's OBDII connector port or where to find it. Google gave me a quick answer: The OBDII connector is a standardized diagnostic port. It's mandatory in all 1996 and newer vehicles. It is under the dashboard on the driver's side. This port enables communication between a scanner and the car's electronic control unit to read diagnostics, clear codes, and provide power.

The BlueDriver Pro Scan tool has over 9,000 diagnostic codes. It sends results via Bluetooth to its companion app. The device reportedly works with up to 90 percent of cars, SUVs and light trucks sold in North America since 1996. The compatibility chart on the BlueDriver site is easy to navigate and lists makes like Ford, GM, Toyota, Honda, BMW and more.

The BlueDriver app is straightforward to read codes, view the vehicle's history, check warning lights, view recalls, vehicle information, and service bulletins. There's a whole lot more, and the app's home screen dashboard is as easy as any to navigate. Once you have the information needed, just email it to yourself so you can pass it on to your mechanic.

It works subscription-free for reports on your engine, fuel system and transmission, among others, and even provides directions for simple tasks like resetting your oil light.

And the uses aren't limited to just your own vehicle; think of plugging it into a used vehicle you might purchase, showing any current issues along with its maintenance history.

https://us.bluedriver.com $89.95

Devialet, a French audio company that touts itself as driven by the unsilenceable pursuit of acoustic excellence, hit my inbox with an announcement about its Devialet Gemini II premium true wireless earbuds, now available in two new colors: light pearl and deep forest.

The colors, along with the original three (black, gold and white), are all new to me since I've never tried or even heard of the luxury earbuds. Devialet engineered last year's launch of the Gemini IIs for 15 years and came away with big sound, full of punch and clarity for all playlists. In fact, not long ago, a reader emailed me with an interesting idea: "Why don't you listen to playlists you don't normally listen to while reviewing earbuds?" So I gave that a try with these and went for playlists of big bands, featuring music from the 1940s.

And the Gemini IIs delivered; while not making me a fan of big bands, the sound that reached my ears was more than appealing. I was hooked on the earbuds and did enjoy how the big band sounded. After testing them for the last few weeks, there's no doubt in my mind about the advanced quality of the sound coming from custom titanium-coated 10mm drivers in each ear.

Helping Devialet reach the level of excellence they strive for were advanced features such as active wind reduction, adaptive noise cancellation and multipoint pairing via Bluetooth 5.2.

Other features include clear, hands-free calls and 5 hours of playtime per charge, with a total of 22 hours with the included wireless charging/storage case. And an IPX4 water and sweat-resistant body. On-ear touch controls are all responsive and can be customized with the Gemini companion app. The app has an equalizer to set the sound you like and audio presets.

The second generation of the Gemini earbuds is 40 percent smaller than the first and features a high-quality build. Once in your ears, they have a comfortable, ergonomic feel, which is a feature I find as critical as the sound they produce. Four ear-tip sizes (XS, S, M, L) are included.

https://www.devialet.com/en-us/true-wireless-earbuds $499

One thing is for sure about portable power: It gets smaller and smaller while offering more features and more power. The Cuktech Power Bank 15 Air is a perfect example of that.

The pocket-sized portable is built with advanced GaN and silicon-carbon technology for faster, cooler and safe charging. It has intelligent power distribution, delivering up to 100 watts from a 15,000 mAh internal battery.

On the front is a smart TFT digital display that provides real-time monitoring of each port, current voltage and temperature, estimated recharge time, and other smart charging features.

It has three ports (two USB-C and one USB-A) that can all work simultaneously. Data supplied by Cuktech had it charging an iPhone 17 Pro Max about 1.7 times or a Samsung S25 Ultra approximately 2.2 times. The USB-C fast charging port provides up to 65 watts of power for charging some laptops and tablets.

A 240-watt USB-C cable is included.

https://cuktech.com/products/cuktech-15-air-power-bank $79.99

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @gregg ellman.

Cuktech Power Bank 15 Air.
Cuktech / TNS

Devialet / TNS
Devialet Gemini II.

Don't make a scammer's life easier

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

This week I received a question about spam emails, "For some time, I am getting emails showing an invoice for services about to be charged to my credit card. Other than ignoring them, do you have any suggestions on how to handle these messages? I've not had any charges to a credit/debit card or withdrawal from bank accounts. So far, I've 'Blocked Contact' when I get one, but these emails are like rabbits in that they seem to multiply. I don't want to change my email address. Any thoughts??"

I've mentioned this before, but it's been a few years.

These emails usually have attachments that are fake invoices or sales orders. When you open it, you'll see it's a bill for a year of antivirus software or for a purchase of Bitcoin through PayPal.

The one thing these emails have in common is a prominent phone number for you to call if you didn't authorize the purchase and want to stop it.

Why?

Previously, you might get a phone call from a scammer, but these days most people don't answer their phones, especially from numbers they don't recognize.

These emails serve to set off an alarm in your head that something bad is about to happen and you need to act fast to stop it – so you call the number.

What the scammers have done is turn the tables. Instead of them calling number after number, hoping to find a sucker who will listen to more than five seconds of their pitch, now they can send out hundreds or thousands of fake emails and simply wait for their phone to ring.

They figure if they can fool someone into believing, and that person actually calls the number, there's a pretty good chance they're in a frantic state and can be talked out of their credit card number or other personal information.

Something like, "Yes, Mr. Smith, the invoice has already been processed, but if you can verify your card number, I can get the charges credited back to your account."

You can block them, if you have nothing better to do, but the email that shows up on the scam message will not be valid, and it will be different when you get the next scam message. Also, the phone number will probably only be active for a short period before they change it.

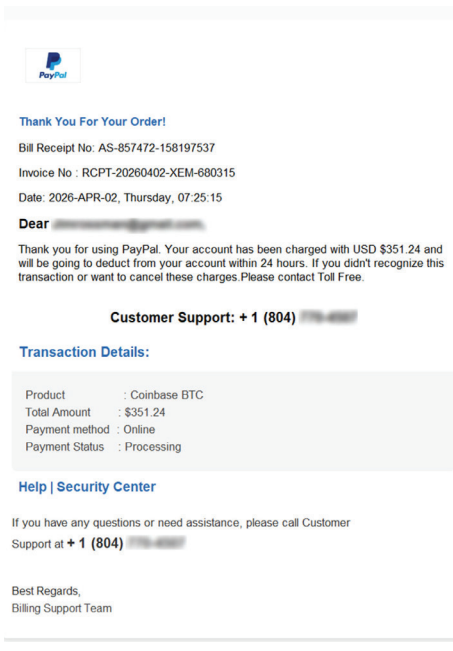
Just ignore them.

Mark them as spam for your email provider and move on.

What can you do?

Just like those spam phone calls, the best course of action is to not acknowledge them at all.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.



PayPal

Thank You For Your Order!

Bill Receipt No: AS-857472-158197537

Invoice No : RCPT-20260402-XEM-680315

Date: 2026-APR-02, Thursday, 07:25:15

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for using PayPal. Your account has been charged with USD $351.24 and will be going to deduct from your account within 24 hours. If you didn't recognize this transaction or want to cancel these charges.Please contact Toll Free.

Customer Support: + 1 (804) [redacted]

Transaction Details:

Product	: Coinbase BTC
Total Amount	: $351.24
Payment method	: Online
Payment Status	: Processing

Help | Security Center

If you have any questions or need assistance, please call Customer Support at + 1 (804) [redacted]

Best Regards,
Billing Support Team

Jim Rossman / TNS
These emails usually have attachments that are fake invoices or sales orders. When you open it, you'll see it's a bill for a year of antivirus software or for a purchase of Bitcoin through PayPal.

They figure if they can fool someone into believing, and that person actually calls the number, there's a pretty good chance they're in a frantic state and can be talked out of their credit card number or other personal information.

TECH REVIEW

Gift ideas for grads

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

We are in the midst of graduation season, and I've been testing some gadgets that would make for great graduation gifts.

Cash is a traditional gift for graduates, but I know a lot of people who like their gift to be a bit more personal.

Fender Elie 6 Portable Bluetooth Speaker ($299.00, fender.com)

Fender is well-known for their guitars and amplifiers, and now they've entered the portable speaker market with the Elie 6 and Elie 12 portable Bluetooth speakers.

The Elie 6 takes its design queues from a long line of Fender amplifiers with a clean rectangular shape. Fender brightens up the design with a single block of wood under the carrying handle.

Sonically, the Elie 6 has three drivers, one tweeter, one full-range and one woofer with a maximum output of 60 watts. The battery is rechargeable via USB-C and you can get 18 hours of playback from a charge. The battery can also charge your phone.

It can take input from any Bluetooth device, from XLR-quarter-inch input from things like a microphone or guitar and it can be used singly or paired with one or more other similar speakers (up to 100 speakers).

The Elie 6 would be very nice practice amp for guitar players and as a Bluetooth speaker, it can really fill a room with very clear sound.

Good sound does come with a bit of weight. The Elie 6 is portable but won't necessarily disappear into your backpack. It weighs 3.95 pounds.

It's IP54 water and dust resistant, meaning it can take a spash at the pool, but not heavy rain or a dunk in the water.

Soundcore Space 2 noise-canceling headphones ($129.99, soundcore.com)

The noise-canceling headphone market is crowded with brands like Bose, Sony and Apple.

Soundcore is the audio brand from Anker, a company known for great computer accessories.

The Space 2 are quite comfortable and there's a wearing detection sensor in the ear cups to pause the music when you take them off.

They recharge with USB-C and you can get up to 50 hours of music playback with noise-canceling on and 70 hours with noise-canceling turned off. In case the battery dies, you can charge them for five minutes and listen for four hours.

Pisen Mag-Safe Qi 2 15W Car Mount Charger TP-C70.
Pisen / TNS

The noise-canceling is enabled with a single button (on/off) and it works really well. They also have a transparency mode that lets you hear what's going on around you.

The headphones' sound can be tweaked through the Soundcore app, and I was very pleased with the quality of the music playback. The app also has one-touch white noise playback.

They come in black, white and sea foam green, and they come with a case. They have the ability to connect to two devices for easy switching between your phone and computer.

The Space 2 has a three-microphone array for taking phone calls.

At a price about half of what you'd pay for noise-canceling headphones from Bose or Sony, the Space 2 are a bargain and do a great job.

Soundcore Space 2 noise-canceling headphones.
Soundcore / TNS

Pisen Mag-Safe Qi 2 15W Car Mount Charger TP-C70 ($29.99, Amazon.com)

Everyone needs a phone mount, and if your phone has Qi wireless charging, the Pisen Mag-Safe Car Mount Charger is the just thing to keep the phone charged while keeping it within reach on your dash.

Mag-Safe is standard on iPhones, but if you have an Android phone, there is an included metal ring to place on your phone or inside the case.

The magnetic mount is strong, but you can pull your phone off easily with one hand.

The charger comes with a USB-C cable and can charge your phone at up to 15W. An iPhone 17 can charge from 0-75 percent in an hour.

It mounts with just a twist to your car's air conditioner vent in about 15 seconds.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.

Fender Elie 6 Portable Bluetooth Speakers.
Fender / TNS

SOUND ADVICE

Fast charger quickly comes to rescue on vacation trip

By DON LINDICH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Hero charger saves the day: I just got a new charger and had not planned on writing about it so soon, but it immediately proved its worth so I am going to relate the experience while it is fresh in my mind.

I am writing this week's column from the Cabana Bay Beach Resort at Universal Orlando, my very favorite hotel worldwide for its immersive mid-century modern atmosphere, excellent lazy river and reasonable pricing for an on-property theme park hotel.

To get here I got up at 2 a.m. for a 5 a.m. direct flight to Orlando. After arriving I took an Uber to Cabana Bay, dropped off my luggage and was at the parks by 9 a.m. I had a full day and did not get to bed until after midnight, so I was up for almost 24 hours. I was tired and forgetful and did not connect my devices to chargers before falling asleep.

I woke up to a 15 percent phone battery and my Apple Watch was almost dead. What a disaster! I did not want to sit around waiting for them to charge or use my power bank, since I might need it to charge later in the day. Before I got in the shower I plugged the phone and watch into my new PD 3.1 charger, called The Youth 140W from AOHi. (Not sure where that name came from, but there wasn't a model called The Adult or The Senior Citizen in the lineup.)

PD 3.1 is a new charging standard designed to be future-proof, and The Youth 140W supports high-speed charging through two ports simultaneously. Most chargers can only do this through one port, and The Youth 140W can even charge two laptops at high speed simultaneously. The battery charge numbers started climbing rapidly and I was able to get my phone and watch charged to 80 percent by the time I left my room, and I made it through the day charging with my power bank later.

The plug folds for compactness and the charger is a bright yellow color that reminds me of a DeWalt power tool. Like a good power tool, the charger is ruggedly built, runs cool and is probably the most solid-feeling charger I have ever handled. The only downside is you must make sure it is firmly plugged in to vertical outlets or it may fall out if you jiggle the cable too hard, which is not uncommon with this kind of charger. (I used it with a horizontal outlet at Cabana Bay.)

PD 3.1 chargers can cost $80 or more, so at $59.99 retail The Youth 140W is a great deal and the current discount code FASTCHARGER at iaohi.com reduces the price $15 to only $44.99. That's a winning, high-performance value, and I am glad I took it on this trip!

Q. Do you have any recommendations for lightweight, cordless leaf blowers? – M.B., Edina, Minnesota

A. I get buried in leaves every fall so I have been through a bunch of leaf blowers. The Kobalt 40V I purchased was heavy and ineffective, so I kept the included battery for use with my lawnmower and gave the blower away. The Black & Decker 20V was only suitable for clearing dirt from the porch. The Ryobi One+ 18V 350 CFM from Home Depot is my runaway favorite for the power, easy handling and long battery life. If you buy one, get the $139 package with 4.0 Ah battery and charger, even if you already have a Ryobi battery system. It is only $30 more than the $109 blower-only, and the battery is worth $99.

Contact Don Lindich at www.soundadvicenews.com and use the "submit question" link on that site.

Don Lindich / TNS

AOHi The Youth 140W Charger.

HOME&GARDEN

Stone is used in different ways from side tables to coffee tables.

Some furnishings especially lighting are giving nod to periods such as Art Deco.

Handout photos / TNS

A chunky sofa displayed in a neutral fabric.

A curved sideboard adds a sense of interest when paired with a circular mirror.

DESIGN RECIPES

Trends in design

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Furniture markets like the annual spring market in High Point, North Carolina, often function much like runway shows in fashion, revealing the newest trends in furniture and home décor.

Curvy lines are prominent as are clean lines and neutral color palettes and natural materials. The trend is understated and minimal as opposed to bold and bright.

Scandinavian influences and organic materials

Light, blonde woods and Scandinavian inspired silhouettes are taking center stage, while darker woods are less prominent. This trend leans heavily into European influences, focusing on functionality, simplicity and craftsmanship.

Curves over corners

Sharp edges are giving way to rounded forms. From curved sofas to circular tables and arched details, organic shapes are being used to create flow and ease within a space. This shift introduces a more relaxed, inviting energy compared to rigid, boxy furniture.

Chunky, comfortable upholstery

Sofas are becoming deeper, fuller and more substantial. Thin arms are out and wider, chunkier arms are in. Neutral tones such as cream and taupe dominate over colors such as gray.

Stone used as a 'statement'

Next to wood, stone is one of the more popular materials being introduced in new product roll outs. Natural stone and materials to mimic stone are being used beyond countertops, appearing on furnishings such as coffee tables, side tables and accent pieces.

Brass remains the dominant finish

Brass remains, hands down, the most popular finish, but in a more muted, sophisticated way. Brassy and bold is out; matte, muted and unpolished is in. This trend is prevalent in several ways including lighting, hardware and furniture accents.

Period influences

While mid-century modern pieces have always remained timeless, furniture makers are also giving a nod to other periods including art deco. Curves, sculptural lighting, two-tone furnishings and furnishings that mix materials are being used to help serve as statement pieces.

Unexpected shapes

Chairs are evolving into conversation pieces. From exaggerated curves to asymmetrical silhouettes, seating is being designed to stand alone as functional art while still integrating into the overall space.

Modern farmhouse

Traditional farmhouse style furniture is being reinterpreted with cleaner lines and more restrained detailing. The look is less rustic and more curated, blending classic references with contemporary finishes.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

A modern farmhouse style dresser with stylized pulls is a modern take on a vintage inspired piece.

TRAVEL

Dreamstime / TNS

Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

What top museums are doing for *America's 250th birthday* celebration

By NOREEN KOMPANIK
TravelPulse (TNS)

The United States of America turns 250 years old on July 4, 2026.

Museums across the U.S. are marking the important milestone not just with patriotic displays, but with exhibitions and programs that go beyond simple celebration to explore our nation's full, complex story. The efforts of these top museums frame the semiquincentennial not just as a commemoration of the past, but as an opportunity to examine the present and imagine the country's future.

Though even smaller museums across the U.S. plan to celebrate in their own unique way, let's look at what some of our top institutions have planned for the year.

Smithsonian Institution

Launching a system-wide initiative called "Our Shared Future: 250," the Smithsonian Institution is focusing on a big-picture national story while questioning what the next 250 years should look like. Its flagship exhibition "In Pursuit of Life, Liberty, & Happiness is built around 250 artifacts from our U.S. history. New and updated exhibits across multiple museums include a refreshed Declaration of Independence diorama and a photography exhibit reflecting America's past and present.

Through August 2026, Smithsonian experts will visit communities across the country to share stories that reflect the richness and complexity of the American experience. "Making History, Making Change" lectures throughout the U.S. will explore how people, moments, and ideals have shaped our history and continue to drive change.

The National Gallery of Art

Located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., this museum is featuring a major exhibition: "Dear America: Artists Explore the American Experience" with an angle of America through the eyes of its artists, past and present, including uncomfortable truths Americans need to know.

New funding has allowed artwork being sent across the country via an "Across the Nation" program that uses art to reinterpret U.S. identity with critical and diverse perspectives.

National Constitution Center

The National Constitution Center in Philadelphia's focus is examining the messy, argumentative side behind the nation's founding, showcasing rare artifacts such as early Constitution printings and interactive galleries exploring debates, protests, and conflicts behind our battle for independence.

The exhibit "America's Founding" explores how power is divided among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, how each branch is empowered to check the others, and how authority is shared between the national government and the states.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City is taking a multi-layered, arts-focused approach to America's 250th – less about a single blockbuster show and more about weaving the anniversary throughout the museum.

A centerpiece of the celebration is an exhibition called "Revolution," which runs through August, featuring objects from across the Met's vast collection. It includes founding fathers like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin along with indigenous leaders, enslaved and free Black voices, and colonial perspectives.

The museum's goal is to show the roots, conflicts, and aftermath of the revolution – not just the victory story, treating the founding as it is – complicated, contested, and still relevant.

American Revolution Museum at Yorktown

As the nation marks its 250th Anniversary, the American Revolutionary Museum at Yorktown offers an immersive look at America's founding, bringing the Revolution to life through personal stories, rare artifacts, films, and interactive exhibits tracing the path from colonial unrest to independence.

Visitors can step into the 18th century through outdoor living history, muster with troops in a re-created Continental Army encampment, watch military drills, and explore daily life on a Revolution-era farm. Hands-on demonstrations from living-history interpreters add depth and context to the experience.

The museum is a key partner in commemorating America's 250th, with exhibitions and events throughout the year to include:

■ Fresh Views of the American Revolution – October 18, 2025 – August 31, 2026

■ Civically Yours Escape Room Family Day – June 27, 2026

■ Liberty Celebration – July 4, 2026

■ Yorktown Victory Celebration – October 17–18, 2026

Norman Rockwell Museum

Located in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in the picturesque Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts, the museum is closely tied to Rockwell himself, who lived and worked there for the last 25 years of his life.

For the 250th anniversary, the museum is putting on a major, centerpiece exhibition, utilizing the artist as its anchor point. "Visions of a Nation: 250 Years from Revolution to Rockwell" will run from June 6 to Oct. 26, spanning the timeframe from the Revolution to today. The exhibition centers around nine core themes about American identity and exploring how artists over 250 years have reflected national ideals like freedom and democracy, helping shape what the ideals mean visually and culturally. The main focus lies in that American identity isn't fixed – it's something artists have been constantly redefining.

National Archives

The Washington D.C. museum is taking on one of the most ambitious and most dramatic projects tied to America's 250th. Instead of visitors coming to our nation's capital, the "Freedom Plane" tour will take some of the country's most important founding documents out of Washington, D.C. and directly to people across the country, which almost never happens.

Between March and August 2026, a specially outfitted Boeing 737 is carrying rare historical documents between eight designated cities and displaying them for one-to-two weeks at each location. For the first time ever, multiple historic documents will be on display together. These real artifacts that defined the country include:

■ A rare 1823 engraving of the Declaration of Independence

■ The Treaty of Paris (1783) that ended the Revolutionary War

■ Early drafts of the U.S. Constitution

■ Oaths of allegiance signed by figures like George Washington

■ Records showing how delegates voted on the Constitution

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

A newer, but major player in the U.S. museum realm, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art is a non-profit art museum in Bentonville, Arkansas, that celebrates the American spirit through art and nature. Founded by philanthropist Alice Walton and designed by architect Moshe Safdie, it has become a cultural landmark for its distinctive architecture, world-class collection, and free public access.

Through July 27, 2026, the museum will feature "America 250: Common Threads" covering 250 years of American art and history, from the Revolutionary era to today, along with historic documents (including an early engraving of the Declaration of Independence), paintings, textiles, quilts, photographs, and everyday objects. The exhibition sports a heavy emphasis on participation with hands-on crafts, interactive experiences, making the 250th feel interactive and community-driven, not just educational.

TRAVEL TIPS

Summer travel 2026 will be most expensive in years, airlines aren't backing off high prices

If you were hoping to score any sort of bargain on summer travel this year, you'll need to work especially hard to find it.

A new analysis of flight searches conducted by Points Path reveals that summer 2026 will be one of the most costly for consumers in a long time.

In particular, domestic cash fares are up roughly 15 percent between June 1 and Sept. 20, while points fares have surged 18 percent. Internationally, cash fares are up 12 percent and points fares are up 14 percent, according to the analysis.

Climbing prices are being driven by a variety of factors, including the U.S.-Israel attack on Iran, which has caused oil prices to spike globally. In response, airlines have been busy cutting capacity growth and raising fees to offset higher jet fuel expenses. Carriers have also seized the opportunity to hike checked baggage fees to help cover their increased costs.

"Summer 2026 is shaping up to be one of the pricier travel seasons we've seen in recent years," said Points Path Founder and CEO Julian Kheel. "And airlines clearly aren't losing sleep over whether travelers will show up this summer. With demand still running strong, there's simply no incentive to lower prices."

Underscoring Kheel's point about the steep travel costs remaining even after the oil market settles, Delta's CEO said during a recent earnings call that higher checked baggage fees will likely be here to stay, serving as a revenue generator going forward. That news comes as Delta Air Lines reported record Q1 revenue of $14.2 billion, an increase of 9 percent year-over-year.

Still, there are places to find value, suggests Points Path. And their latest report breaks down where and how to do that, along with key statistics on summer travel 2026. Here's a closer look.

Key airfare trends

■ Prices are up year over year for both domestic and international travel.

■ Points fares are increasing even faster than cash fares

■ Domestic fares remain volatile, especially on peak summer dates

■ International fares are up ~6–12 percent, depending on route

Where travelers can still find deals

■ Mid-to-late August (when demand starts to taper)

■ Tuesdays (17.6 percent cheaper than Sundays), plus Wednesdays and Saturdays

■ Secondary cities and alternative airports

■ Routes with added airline capacity

■ International premium cabins

Unexpected sweet spot

For deal hunters, here's one bright spot to scout as you scope out summer flights.

■ International premium cabins (business/first) are up just ~7 percent

■ Compared to steep economy cabin increases, this is a rare value opportunity

"Travelers have been gravitating toward premium experiences ever since the pandemic, but a 7 percent increase in business and first-class cash fares is remarkably modest," said Kheel. "For travelers who've been eyeing an upgrade, this summer may actually be the time to pull the trigger."

Best (cheapest) travel timing

■ Cheapest dates cluster in mid-to-late August (e.g., Aug. 1, Aug. 14, Aug. 26)

■ Peak pricing remains late June through July

■ Booking early still matters as prices are expected to rise

Where travelers are going for summer 2026

So, where's everyone headed this summer? The Points Path report sheds light on that as well. It seems domestically, summer travelers are focusing on two specific areas: major cities (especially those that get snowed-in during the winter) and West Coast destinations. Meanwhile, internationally, the usual trifecta is dominating summer getaways.

■ Domestic: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, Boston

■ International: London, Paris, Rome, Cancun, Dublin

– Mia Taylor / TravelPulse (TNS)